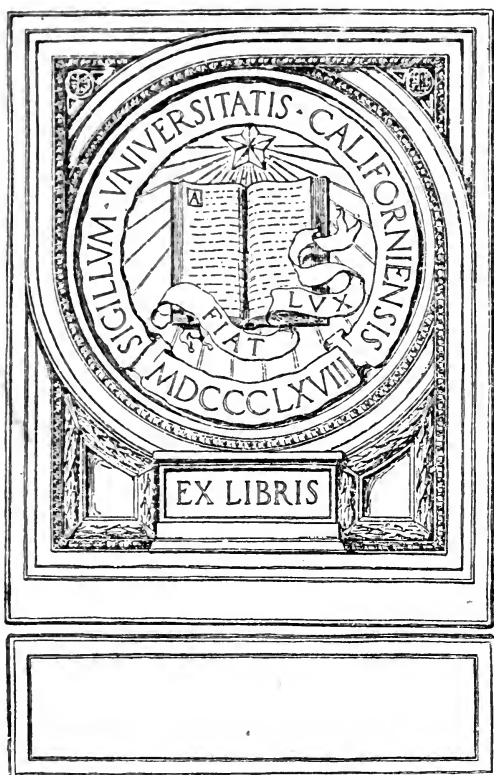
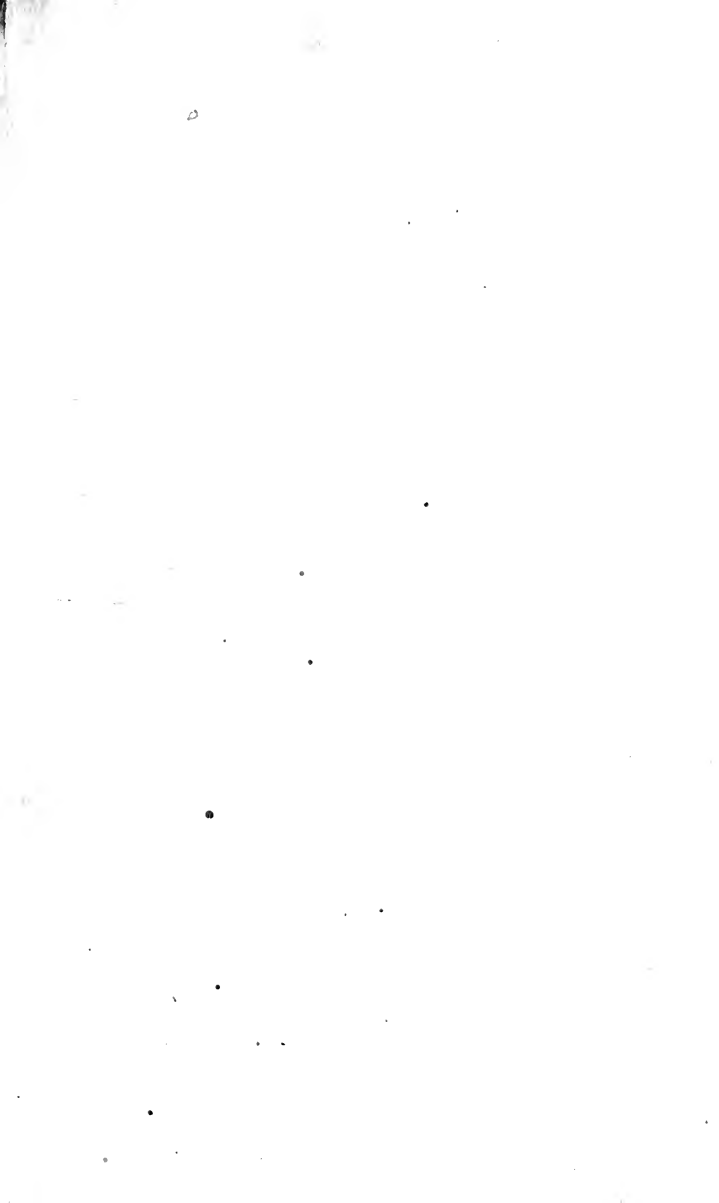


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MAIN

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

FREDERICK MALDONADO

LAURENCE TRENWITH

CROKER HARRINGTON

ARCHIBALD KANE

COLONEL WYNNING

SERVANT AT MRS. BELLAMY'S IN KENSINGTON

SERVANT AT THE VILLA PRIGNO

IRIS BELLAMY

FANNY SYLVAIN

AUREA VYSE

MRS. WYNNING

MISS PINSENT

WOMAN-SERVANT AT THE VILLA PRIGNO

WOMAN-SERVANT AT THE FLAT IN PARK STREET

*This Play was first acted at
the Garrick Theatre, London,
on Saturday, Sept. 21, 1901*

THE FIRST ACT

LONDON. MRS. BELLAMY'S HOUSE IN KENSINGTON

THE SECOND ACT

ITALY. THE VILLA PRIGNO AT CADENABBIA ON THE
LAKE OF COMO

THE THIRD ACT

THE SAME

THE FOURTH ACT

LONDON. A FLAT IN PARK STREET

THE FIFTH ACT

THE SAME

In both the First Act and the Third the action is divided into three Episodes, which are marked by the falling of the curtain. Between the Third Act and the Fourth two years are supposed to elapse.



IRIS

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents two drawing-rooms of equal size upon the ground floor of a house in Kensington. In the wall separating the rooms are two arched entrances—the one on the right-hand side, the other on the left—and in the centre, between these entrances, is a fireplace. Over the fireplace is an opening, shaped and framed like a mirror ; so that, with the view gained through the archways, the further room is almost entirely disclosed. In this further room, on the left, is a single door admitting to a small apartment ; in the centre, at the back, is a conservatory seen through glazed doors ; and on the right is a window affording a view of a garden. On the left-hand side of the room nearer the spectator are double-doors opening from the inner hall of the house ; and, on the right, facing these doors, there is a spacious circular bow in which are three french-windows also looking on to the garden. The rooms are richly furnished and decorated. In the further room a grand piano—adorned with paintings in the style of Watteau and Lancret—and a music-stool stand by the window. By the side of the piano is a chair ; and on the other side of the

room are two chairs, placed together, under the branches of a high palm. Against the walls are cabinets containing articles de vertu. In the nearer room there is an armchair on each side of the fireplace, and, facing the fireplace, a luxurious "Chesterfield" settee with a piece of rich silk draped over the back. Behind the settee stands a French ottoman. On the left of the room are a settee of a more formal kind, a table, and a "window-stool"; and on the right a writing-table and two chairs—the one in front of the table, the other by the side of it. Also on the right, between the bow and the entrance to the further room, another high palm shelters a smaller settee. There are flowers in profusion; some are arranged in vases and jardinières, while a bank of blossom partially conceals the fireplace.

The light is that of a fine evening in summer. The warm glow of sunset is seen in the garden and in the conservatory.

[NOTE:—The descriptions of the scenery, and the directions for the movement of the characters, are set out as from the point of view of the audience. Thus, Right and Left are the spectator's right and left, not the actor's.]

[MISS PINSENT, a cheerful young lady in dinner dress, is seated at the writing-table, writing. A man-servant enters from the hall.

SERVANT.

Mr. Kane.

[The servant is followed by ARCHIBALD KANE, a "smart," well-tailored man of middle age. He carries an opera hat, wears an orchid in

his button-hole, and has an air of some authority.

MISS PINSENT.

[*Advancing and shaking hands with him cordially.*]
How do you do? [*To the servant, who withdraws.*]
Tell Mrs. Bellamy. [*To KANE.*] She is not down yet.

KANE.

Don't be scandalised at my premature appearance. She has asked me to give her a few minutes' talk before her guests arrive.

MISS PINSENT.

[*Laughingly.*] I see. For a quarter of an hour you are not a guest.

KANE.

[*In the same spirit.*] Merely a hard-working, conscientious solicitor. And how are you, my dear Miss Pinsent?

MISS PINSENT.

I? [*Again at the writing-table, putting the writing-materials in order.*] A woman who has the good fortune to be attached to the household of such a sweet creature as Mrs. Bellamy can't be otherwise than robust and happy.

KANE.

I need not ask after her; she was looking radiant at Hurlingham on Saturday.

MISS PINSENT.

Yes—out of the house.

KANE.

Nothing amiss, I hope

MISS PINSENT.

She seems depressed, in low spirits.

KANE.

The end of the season—fatigue.

MISS PINSENT.

Scarcely. She has been fretting for weeks.

KANE.

Fretting?

MISS PINSENT.

Brooding.

KANE.

Upon what?

MISS PINSENT.

What does my sex brood over? Religion, the affections, the discovery of a grey hair, anything, everything. [*Returning to him.*] I rather fancy the old grievance still irritates her occasionally.

KANE

The old——?

MISS PINSENT.

Her husband's Will.

KANE.

Ho! Poor dear lady, will she never become reconciled to its conditions?

MISS PINSENT.

Never is a big word. After all, these are early days.

KANE.

She has been five years a widow.

MISS PINSENT.

She is only six-and-twenty now.

KANE.

And well-off, as far as her heedlessness in money-matters will permit of her being so. Let her compare her situation with that of other women. Six-and-twenty and independent !

MISS PINSENT.

And unable to re-marry !

KANE.

She could commit even that indiscretion if she pleased.

MISS PINSENT.

Under penalty of losing every penny of her income.

KANE.

If she married a rich man, her interest in her late husband's estate would be no longer indispensable to her.

MISS PINSENT.

Rich men generally have some odious quality to counterbalance their wealth. The men one would marry are as poor as mice.

KANE.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Well, Wills such as Mr. George Adair Bellamy's are common enough.

MISS PINSENT.

The more's the shame. [*With mock severity.*] I wonder you care to be a trustee under so iniquitous an instrument.

KANE.

Ha, ha ! the position isn't altogether a bed of roses. It has already worried my fellow-trustee, poor Mr. Cautherley, into his grave. However, we ought not to discuss Mrs. Bellamy's affairs too freely.

MISS PINSENT.

Of course not ; I beg your pardon. [*With a change of manner.*] I say, Mr. Kane.

KANE.

Yes ?

MISS PINSENT.

I wish you would render me a service.

KANE.

Delighted.

MISS PINSENT.

You are connected with a number of little concerns that pay decent dividends, aren't you—nice, snug little schemes that the public isn't allowed to dip its hands into ?

KANE.

Who tells you so ?

MISS PINSENT.

Mrs. Bellamy. She says you do wonders for her great friend, Miss Sylvain, and for Mr. Harrington.

KANE.

Well?

MISS PINSENT.

I've managed to scrape together nearly three hundred pounds. To you it's the merest trifle, but—*[coaxingly]* you might help a poor lady's-companion to increase her store.

KANE.

Ha, ha!

MISS PINSENT.

Don't laugh. Let me come and see you, will you?

KANE.

Honoured.

MISS PINSENT.

In Lincoln's Inn Fields?

KANE.

[Writing on his shirt-cuff.] To-morrow?

MISS PINSENT.

[With a nod.] At what time?

KANE.

Four o'clock?

MISS PINSENT.

Oh, I'm awfully obliged; I—*[listening]* This is she, I think.

[IRIS, richly but delicately gowned, enters, at the door in the further room, drawing on her gloves. She comes to KANE and gives him her hand. She is a beautiful woman, with a soft, appealing voice and movements instinct with simple grace and dignity. Her manner is characterised by a repose amounting almost to languor.]

MISS PINSENT.

[Taking from the writing-table the paper upon which she had been writing and presenting it to IRIS.] The arrangement of the couples at dinner.

[IRIS slips the paper into her bodice, and MISS PINSENT withdraws, passing through the further room.]

IRIS.

[Glancing into the further room, to assure herself that she and KANE are alone, then indicating the doors in the nearer room.] Is there a draught?

[He closes the doors while she seats herself upon the ottoman.]

IRIS.

I want to talk to you, Archie, concerning a young man in whom I am slightly interested.

KANE.

[Sitting, facing her, upon the window-stool.] Oh yes.

IRIS.

A Mr. Trenwith.

KANE.

Do I know him ?

IRIS.

You may have met him ; he has been about this season a great deal. Surely I introduced him to you one night during " *La Bohème* " ?

KANE.

Oh, is he the good-looking boy I have seen in your box at the opera several times recently ?

IRIS.

Two or three times.

KANE.

His name had escaped me. And he was at Hurlingham with you on Saturday, wasn't he ?

IRIS.

More with the Littledales than with me. I gave him a lift down. He's quite poor, you know.

KANE.

Really ? He must have friends—the Littledales, for example.

IRIS.

Women-friends who ask him to parties. They are of no use when even a cab-fare is a consideration. It occurred to me that you might be inclined to exert your influence in some direction or another in his behalf.

KANE.

What's his age ?

IRIS

IRIS.

Twenty-eight, I am afraid.

KANE.

Whew! Ever done anything?

IRIS.

He has tried many things.

KANE.

[*Ominously.*] H'm!

IRIS.

His great misfortune was being ploughed for the army. That was a thousand pities. Lately he has been reading for the bar; but he finds he has no taste for law. His ear for music is wonderful, and he draws cleverly in pastel.

KANE.

The failures in life are masters of the minor talents.

IRIS.

[*In gentle reproof.*] Hush! And now his only relative with money and position—an uncle who is an archdeacon—has become disheartened. You would expect an archdeacon to be sympathetic and patient, would you not?

KANE.

Beyond a certain point, I would not.

IRIS.

You are too cynical. At any rate, this uncle offers

him a few hundred pounds on the understanding that he goes out to a cattle-ranche in British Columbia—a dreadful place, a sort of genteel Siberia. I am so grieved for the boy.

KANE.

A difficult case.

IRIS.

Don't say that.

KANE.

He belongs to a large class; he is a young gentleman to whom it is absolutely essential that somebody should bequeath five-thousand-a-year.

IRIS.

You will jest, Archie.

KANE.

My dear Iris, what career is there, apart from the criminal, for engaging but impecunious incapacity? In its usual course, it begins with a beggarly secretaryship, passes through the intermediate stages of a precarious interest in a wine business and a disastrous association with the Turf and the Stock Exchange, and ends with the selling, on commission, of an obsolete atlas or an unwieldy bible.

IRIS.

[*Shudderingly.*] Terrible!

KANE.

Will you follow my advice?

IRIS.

[*With a sigh of discontent.*] Oh!

IRIS

KANE.

Back up the archdeacon. Urge the young man to clear out without delay.

[She rises and moves to the fireplace, where she stands looking down upon the flowers.]

KANE.

[Rising with her.] I appear extremely disagreeable.

IRIS.

No, no.

KANE.

[Strolling over to the writing-table and examining a photograph which he finds there.] This is Mr. Trenwith, is it not?

IRIS.

[After a glance in his direction, sitting upon the settee facing the fireplace.] Yes.

KANE.

[Replacing the photograph and approaching her.] Shall I bore you by offering a little further counsel?

IRIS.

You are very good.

KANE.

[Sitting on the ottoman.] Iris, a woman in your position can't be too cautious.

IRIS.

Cautious?

KANE.

I don't want to disturb you by recalling the terms of poor George's Will. At the same time——

IRIS.

[*Turning to him.*] My dear Archie, nothing that *you* can say upon the subject will disturb me. The threats of that Will seem to me to be weaved into the decorations of my walls. I construe them daily, almost hourly. [*Closing her eyes as she recites.*] “You forfeit all interest in your late husband's estate by re-marrying.” I tread them into my carpets. [*As before.*] “In such an event the whole source of your income passes to others.” The street-music makes a lilt of them. “You have no separate estate; wed again and you cease to be of independent means.” When a stranger is presented to me, I divine his thoughts instantly. “Why, you are the woman,” he remarks to himself, “who loses her money by re-marrying.” [*Reclining upon a pillow with a faint attempt at a laugh.*] Ha! For the thousandth time, why are such provisions made, can you tell me?

KANE.

They are designed primarily, I hope, to protect the widow——

IRIS.

To protect her!

KANE.

From unscrupulous men, from fortune-hunters. In the present instance, for example, it is only fair to assume that your husband, knowing how greatly your

happiness depends upon personal comfort, was actuated solely by a desire to safeguard you.

IRIS.

Ah, this safeguarding of women ! Its effects may be humiliating, cruel.

KANE.

H'm ! Upon one of its effects, as concerning yourself, I should like to lay particular stress. May I be perfectly frank ?

IRIS.

Do.

KANE.

Allow me to remind you, then, that a lady circumstanced as you are—still youthful, beautiful——

IRIS.

[*Touching his sleeve gently.*] Sssh *hush*.

KANE.

Who is seen constantly in the company of a young man whom she could not dream of marrying, subjects herself inevitably to a considerable amount of ill-natured criticism.

[*She raises herself, looking at him.*]

KANE.

Criticism—conjecture—scandal.

IRIS.

[*After a brief pause.*] I didn't think you meant that. Ah, thanks.

[*She leaves the settee, showing signs of discomposure.*]

KANE.

[*Standing before her.*] I have completely spoilt your enjoyment of your little dinner-party.

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Dear friend. This is the advantage of employing a fashionable solicitor, one whose practice has its roots in the gay parterres of Society. I get the gossip of the boudoir at first hand.

KANE.

[*Deprecatingly.*] My object——

IRIS.

[*Sweetly.*] Ah, I am infinitely obliged. [*Hesitatingly.*]
But—Archie——

KANE.

Yes?

IRIS.

[*Her head averted.*] You don't believe, evidently, that I am capable of throwing selfish considerations to the winds—marrying a poor man——?

KANE.

You!

IRIS.

[*Sitting upon the window-stool.*] I know; the last woman on earth, you would say, who would find courage for such an act.

KANE.

Are you joking?

IRIS.

Ha!

KANE.

You marry a poor man; you with your utter disregard for the value of money! Why, luxury to you is the salt of life, my dear Iris. Great heavens!

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] I try to do a little good with my money, too, Archie.

KANE.

An indiscriminate sovereign to a beggar where a shilling would suffice; three times his fare to every cabman——

IRIS.

Oh, don't scold me!

KANE.

Not I. I gave that up long since. You were sent into the world so constituted.

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] So afflicted. You are right, Archie—the step would be preposterous.

KANE.

[*Raising his hands.*] Ho!

IRIS.

[*Wistfully.*] Only I should like to think that I don't

shrink from it out of sheer worldliness and cowardice. I should like to think—tssh! [*Rising.*] As you observe, one is sent into the world shaped this way or that. [*Producing MISS PINSENT'S memorandum and referring to it.*] Will you take Fanny Sylvain in to dinner?

KANE.

Charmed. Who are your guests?

IRIS.

Fanny and a little niece of hers whom she has taken under her wing, dear Croker, the Wynnings—

KANE.

Delightful.

IRIS.

[*Walking away from him, to avoid the embarrassment of meeting his eye.*] And Mr. Trenwith. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, and Frederick Maldonado.

KANE.

Maldonado!

IRIS.

Yes.

KANE.

May I say I'm glad? The wound is healed, then?

IRIS.

He writes begging me to include him again in my dinner-parties. Poor Maldo!

[*She is standing beside the writing-table. From a drawer she takes out a ring-case and produces a tiny ring.*]

KANE.

What's that ?

IRIS.

[*Slipping the ring on to her finger and displaying it.*] A token. He gave it to me when he—at the time—telling me that, if ever I relented, I had only to return it to him without a word and, no matter what part of the globe it found him in, he would come to me on wings.

KANE.

The plumage is golden, in his case, Iris.

IRIS.

Yes. [*Closing her eyes for a moment.*] But I couldn't, Archie. [*Removing the ring from her finger thoughtfully.*] Yet I've been on the point of sending this to him more than once during the past month.

KANE.

You have ?

IRIS.

[*Mechanically replacing the ring in its drawer.*] As a way out of my perplexity.

[*The double-doors are thrown open and a servant announces "Miss Sylvain and Miss Vyse."* IRIS advances to greet FANNY SYLVAIN, who enters with AUREA. FANNY is a bright, attractive woman of thirty, AUREA a frank-looking girl still in her teens FANNY and IRIS kiss affectionately.

IRIS.

Dear Fanny !

FANNY.

Dear Iris ! [*Presenting AUREA.*] My niece, Aurea.

IRIS.

[*Advancing to AUREA.*] Ah !

FANNY.

[*Shaking hands with KANE.*] Well, Archie !

KANE.

[*Talking to her apart.*] How are you, Fanny ? I've bad news for you.

FANNY.

[*Clutching his arm.*] No.

KANE.

I am to take you in to dinner.

FANNY.

[*Faintly.*] Brute ! I thought you were going to tell me that some of my investments have gone wrong.

KANE.

Ha, ha, ha !

FANNY.

[*In an eager whisper.*] You are still doing well for me, Archie ?

[*MISS PINSENT has reappeared in the further room ; she now joins FANNY and KANE, shaking hands with the former.*

IRIS.

[*With AUREA, by the settee on the left.*] And so this is your first dinner-party, Aurea?

AUREA.

Of a formal kind.

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] A few old friends gathered together for the last time this season.

AUREA.

Anyway, it is sweet of you to include me.

COLONEL and MRS. WYNNING are announced.

WYNNING is a soldierly man of fifty-five, his wife a pleasant-looking lady much his junior.

IRIS.

[*Shaking hands with the WYNNINGS.*] How do you do? How do you do?

WYNNING.

How are you?

IRIS.

[*To both.*] Were you riding in the Park this morning?

MRS. WYNNING.

Jack was; I have lumbago.

IRIS.

That is very painful, is it not?

WYNNING.

[*With disgust.*] When I was a boy only servants had it. By Jove, these are levelling days with a vengeance! [*Shaking hands with FANNY, who has come to MRS. WYNNING.*] How you, Miss Sylvain? [*Seeing KANE.*] Hullo, Kane! [*Shaking hands with MISS PINSENT.*] How you?

MRS. WYNNING.

[*Greeting MISS PINSENT.*] How do you do?

MRS. WYNNING, MISS PINSENT, and KANE, in one group, and COLONEL WYNNING and IRIS, forming another, talk together on the right, while FANNY joins AUREA, who is now seated upon the settee on the left.

FANNY.

[*To AUREA.*] Well, are you disappointed?

AUREA.

She is adorable!

FANNY.

[*Sitting, facing AUREA, upon the window-stool—triumphantly.*] Ah!

AUREA.

When did you and she first know each other, aunt?

FANNY.

When she was fourteen. We were at school together. Even then there wasn't a girl who wouldn't have sold her little white soul for a caress from Iris. And the spell she casts never weakens. Here am I,

a woman of thirty, and I believe she is more attractive to me than ever.

AUREA.

Of course she'll marry again ; she must.

FANNY.

She has been pestered to distraction ever since she discarded her mourning.

AUREA.

[*Eagerly.*] Tell me, are any of the men dining here this evening in love with her?

FANNY.

Some of them are, or were. [*Glancing in the direction of the WYNNINGS.*] Colonel Wynning married that amiable creature over there in despair at having been refused three times.

AUREA.

[*Awe-stricken.*] Does his wife know it?

FANNY.

Certainly ; and feels honoured, as she ought.

[*A servant announces "Mr. Harrington," and CROKER HARRINGTON, a dapper but exceedingly ugly little man of five-and thirty, enters gaily.*

IRIS.

[*Welcoming him.*] So pleased to see you, Croker.

CROKER.

[*Kissing her hand gallantly.*] Dear lady! [*Discovering FANNY.*] Ah! those alabaster shoulders can belong but to one person.

FANNY.

[*Giving him her left hand, which he presses to his bosom.*] I hate you; you didn't come to the bazaar yesterday.

CROKER.

I did better; I told the richest man I know to go there.

FANNY.

Freddy Maldonado? He never turned up.

CROKER.

The traitor! My fingers shall be at his throat directly he appears. [*To IRIS.*] He's to be here to-night?

IRIS.

Yes.

[*He joins those on the right and is received joyously. IRIS exchanges a few words with FANNY and AUREA, and then, producing MISS PINSENT'S memorandum, goes to CROKER.*

AUREA.

[*To FANNY.*] I hope that plain little gentleman has never dared——

FANNY.

Mr. Harrington? Oh, yes, Croker Harrington has dared in his time.

AUREA.

No!

FANNY.

He laughs openly at his repeated failures. He laughs till he cries, he says, but I suspect the laughter has not always accompanied the tears. Dear Croker! However, he is now resigned to his position.

AUREA.

His position?

FANNY.

He declares he wonders why the Inland Revenue people don't fine Iris for omitting to take out a dog-licence for him.

AUREA.

[*Tenderly.*] Poor little man! Still, he is so exceedingly ugly.

FANNY.

The most sensible men in the world, my dear.

AUREA.

The ugly ones?

FANNY.

The vainest of them confide the truth to themselves at least once a day, while shaving.

[FREDERICK MALDONADO *is announced.* He enters—a tall, massive man of about forty, with brown hair and beard, handsome

according to the Jewish type, somewhat ebullient in manner, his figure already tending to corpulency.

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand, with perfect dignity.*] You have been too long a stranger, Maldo. Welcome!

MALDONADO.

[*Softly.*] Maldo—my old diminutive. Time is effaced by your use of it. [*Shaking hands with FANNY.*] Fanny—

FANNY.

You didn't patronise the bazaar yesterday, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

Sincere regrets. I found it impossible to get away from the City. [*Greeting CROKER and KANE.*] My dear Croker! Archie, my good friend!

IRIS.

[*Presenting him to the WYNNINGS.*] Mrs. Wynning, let me introduce Mr. Frederick Maldonado. Colonel Wynnning—

[*He bows to them and shakes hands with MISS PINSENT.*]

AUREA.

[*To FANNY.*] Who is that?

FANNY.

Frederick, one of the great Maldonado family.

AUREA.

Great ?

FANNY.

Well, not great—big ; big financiers.

AUREA.

Foreign ?

FANNY.

The grandfather was a Jew tradesman in Madrid who broke and went out to South America. He made a fortune in tobacco in Havannah and afterwards married an Englishwoman. Since then our public schools have been favoured with the education of the male Maldonados. They're reckoned among the three leading groups of financiers in Europe.

AUREA.

What is a financier, exactly ?

FANNY.

A financier ? Oh, a pawnbroker with imagination.

AUREA.

Aunt ! And is *he* in love with—— ?

FANNY.

[*To KANE, who at this moment appears at her side.*]
Ah ! we are talking about *her*. How ethereal she looks this evening ! My niece, Archie—[*to AUREA*]
Mr. Kane.

[*KANE remains with them, talking. A servant announces, “ Mr. Laurence Trenwith,”*

and LAURENCE, a handsome, stalwart, but still boyish young man, enters. IRIS advances to meet him; her lips form the words of a welcome; they shake hands silently.

IRIS.

[*In a low, level voice.*] You know many who are here, I think. [*Moving away to the right, he following.*] You have met Mrs. Wynning? No? [*Presenting* LAURENCE.] Mr. Trenwith. Colonel Wynning. Mr. Harrington I am sure you know. Mr. Frederick Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[*Shaking hands with* MISS PINSENT *after bowing to the others.*] How do you do?

FANNY.

[*Who has risen—to* KANE, *in a whisper.*] Archie, thank goodness she starts for Switzerland on Saturday!

KANE.

[*To* FANNY, *with a nod.*] H'm, [*A servant enters.*]

SERVANT.

Dinner is served.

[*The servant retires.* IRIS brings LAURENCE over to the left.

KANE.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] How do you do?

FANNY.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] How are you, Mr. Trenwith?
[FANNY and KANE move away.]

IRIS.

[*Presenting LAURENCE to AUREA.*] Mr. Trenwith—Miss Vyse. [*To LAURENCE.*] Will you take Miss Vyse?

LAURENCE.

With great pleasure.

IRIS.

[*In the centre of the room.*] Croker, please play host and go first with Mrs. WYNNING.

[CROKER gives his arm to MRS. WYNNING and they pass out. COLONEL WYNNING, after a polite offer of precedence to KANE and FANNY, follows with MISS PINSENT. FANNY and KANE go next, then LAURENCE and AUREA. To MALDONADO'S surprise, IRIS stands immovable, looking into space.]

MALDONADO.

[*Proffering his arm.*] I am to have the honour——?

[*Suddenly, with a gleam of resolution in her eyes, she moves to the writing-table and again produces MALDONADO'S ring. She offers it to him.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Receiving it incredulously.*] My ring!

IRIS.

The token, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

Iris——? [*Intensely.*] Iris!

IRIS.

Hush! [*Passing him, then turning and placing her arm in his quite collectedly.*] Have you been abroad lately? I read of your being in Vienna in the spring——

[*The curtain falls as they go out. It rises again almost instantly, showing the window-blinds lowered and the rooms brilliantly lighted. In the conservatory little lamps glitter among the palms and flowers. IRIS and MRS. WYNNING occupy the settee in the centre; FANNY is in the chair on their right. MISS PINSENT is at the piano, playing the final bars of a nocturne of Chopin, while AUREA sits near her turning over some music. The men enter—COLONEL WYNNING and KANE appearing first; MALDONADO, CROKER, and LAURENCE following. IRIS rises and motions KANE to withdraw with her from the rest. MALDONADO places himself beside MRS. WYNNING; CROKER, standing facing them, takes part in their talk. WYNNING and FANNY seat themselves on the settee under the palm on the right; LAURENCE joins AUREA and MISS PINSENT at the piano.*]

IRIS.

[*Standing by the settee on the left, speaking in a low voice.*] Archie——

KANE.

Yes ?

IRIS.

You need be under no apprehension concerning me. I have done it.

KANE.

You have done what ?

IRIS.

Ended my perplexity. I have told Frederick Maldonado I will marry him.

KANE.

Iris !

IRIS.

Not a word, if you please, to anybody. I will not have it announced till after I have left town.

KANE.

Accept my congratulations. What made you form this resolution so suddenly, may I ask ?

IRIS.

I felt the sensation of stumbling, that I must snatch at something tangible. [*Closing her eyes.*] I am glad.

KANE.

I hope it is for your happiness.

IRIS.

It is for my safety. There is now no risk of further scandal should Mr. Trenwith decide to remain in England.

KANE.

[*Approvingly.*] Good!

IRIS.

On the other hand, if he migrates to British Columbia, I stifle the temptation to play housewife among the pots and pans of his poor little log-hut. I am secure either way.

KANE.

Whew! Then you did entertain the idea seriously?

IRIS.

[*Simply.*] I have been miserably perplexed.

[MISS PINSENT *plays some snatches of music lightly.* CROKER *approaches* IRIS and KANE.

CROKER.

My dear Iris, what a delightful dinner you have given us!

KANE.

Your dinners are always charming.

IRIS.

[*Sitting upon the settee.*] My guests are always charming.

[KANE *moves away, joining* WYNNING and FANNY. WYNNING *yields his place to* KANE

and ultimately sits with AUREA under the palm in the further room.

CROKER.

[*Sitting facing IRIS, his tone changing slightly.*]
Divinity, what's the matter with you to-night?

IRIS.

The matter?

CROKER.

Something disturbs you, distresses you.

IRIS.

[*Playfully.*] How do I show it, Faithful One?

CROKER.

[*In the same spirit.*] In your lustrous and never-to-be-forgotten eyes.

IRIS.

[*Beating a pillow and nestling in it.*] Ha! I am simply dog-weary. It has been a hard season for your poor Divinity. Oh, how I am longing for my month among the mountains and my sun-bath at Cadenabbia!

CROKER.

You drop down to the lakes, then, after St. Moritz?

IRIS.

Yes, I am renting the Villa Prigno and its staff of servants from its owner, Mrs. Van Reisler, for a few weeks.

CROKER.

When are you off?

IRIS.

On Saturday. This is farewell.

CROKER.

I picture the caravan; the fair Pinsent, your courier, your maid, your fruit, your flowers, your birds—no, not those troublesome birds.

IRIS.

You know I never move anywhere without my birds. Are you coming to Switzerland this year?

CROKER.

[*Almost surlily, looking away.*] No. Perhaps. [*Softening.*] Of course I am. I am one of your human birds, Divinity.

IRIS.

One of my great, kind human birds, that fly after me wheresoever I go.

CROKER.

[*Bitterly.*] That fly, yes—and yet are caged.

IRIS.

[*Reprovingly.*] Hush! Croker!

CROKER.

I beg your pardon. It slipped out.

IRIS.

Ah, I'll not be vexed with you.

CROKER.

[*Remorsefully.*] I am continually breaking my promise. Some day you'll tire of me and send me about my business.

IRIS.

Never. [*Bending towards him.*] Faithful One, do you think I could afford to lose your true friendship, your ceaseless solicitude, your——?

[*She sees LAURENCE—who is now standing at the writing-table, waiting for an opportunity of approaching her—falters and breaks off.*]

IRIS.

[*In an altered tone.*] Croker, ask Kate to play my favourite mazurka—will you?

CROKER.

[*Rising.*] Certainly.

[*He delivers his message to MISS PINSENT, remaining by her side while she plays. With a look, IRIS draws LAURENCE to her. As he advances she changes her place from the settee to the window-stool.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Standing beside her, speaking in a low voice.*] This is the first opportunity I have had of a word with you.

IRIS.

Yes.

LAURENCE.

I have something to tell you. May I——?

[She motions him to the settee.]

LAURENCE.

[Sitting.] I have accepted my uncle's proposal.

IRIS.

[Unemotionally.] You have?

LAURENCE.

There is nothing for it but that, nothing that I can hit upon. I go down to Rapley, to talk matters over with the old man, to-morrow.

IRIS.

Oh, yes.

LAURENCE.

So this may be the last time we shall ever meet; unless you—oh, I feel how presumptuous I am to allude to it again!

IRIS

Unless I——?

LAURENCE.

Could, after all, bring yourself to share my rough lot with me. A mad, selfish idea, I know. Feelings like mine make one mad.

IRIS.

Please! A mad idea, indeed.

LAURENCE.

[*With a break in his voice.*] It's good-bye, then.

IRIS.

When will you be back from Rapley?

LAURENCE.

I sha'n't come back; my uncle insists upon my spending my remaining few hours with him. Then I shall go straight to Liverpool.

IRIS.

You sail——?

LAURENCE.

On the thirtieth—the day you start for Switzerland, I hear? [*She assents dumbly.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Appealingly.*] Let me stay behind for a few moments to-night after your friends have left.

IRIS.

I am sorry; Mr. Maldonado has already made a similar request.

LAURENCE.

Oh, but you can excuse yourself to him?

IRIS.

I—I fear not.

LAURENCE.

Forgive me. I thought, this being the end of our --[*rising*]*—never mind.*

[*She rises with him. They face one another.*]

LAURENCE.

I shall write to you from Rapley, if I may; and send you a wire from Liverpool. And when I get to Chilcoten—River Ranche, Chilcoten, British Columbia—I'll—would once a month be too often? Oh, how happy I've been!

[She gives a quick glance round, conscious of a general movement, and sees that her guests are preparing to depart. WYNNING has joined MRS. WYNNING.]

IRIS.

[Hastily but composedly, in a low voice.] Laurence——

LAURENCE.

Yes.

IRIS.

Return in about an hour's time. Be outside the house, on the other side of the way. Watch the door——

[The WYNNINGS come to her.]

IRIS.

[Turning to MRS. WYNNING.] Must you——?

MRS. WYNNING.

We have to go on.

WYNNING.

[Cheerfully.] Three o'clock in the morning again for us. This week sees the last of it, thank God,

MRS. WYNNING.

When one has lumbago one may as well keep up right as not.

IRIS.

I ought to follow you, but I am too indolent to-night.

MRS. WYNNING.

[*Kissing her.*] It has been so pleasant.

WYNNING.

[*Shaking hands.*] Charming.

[*They shake hands with the rest—who are engaged in bidding each other good night—and withdraw, MISS PINSENT accompanying them.*]

IRIS.

[*To FANNY, who comes to her with AUREA.*] You too, Fanny?

FANNY.

Only to the Chadwicks, for the sake of this girl, and then to by-by. [*Kissing her on both cheeks.*] Your dinner-table looked superb.

AUREA.

Do let me thank you, dear Mrs. Bellamy.

IRIS.

[*To AUREA.*] Well——?

AUREA.

[*In answer.*] Oh, I should like to dine out every night of my life !

IRIS.

Ha !

AUREA.

If I could always watch your face through the flowers.

[*IRIS kisses her and walks with them to the door.*

FANNY.

Will you be at home at tea-time to-morrow ?

IRIS.

To you, Fanny. *An revoir !*

[*They depart as CROKER approaches her.*

IRIS.

Are you for gaieties, Croker ?

CROKER.

Not I. [*Kissing her hand.*] The last act of "Messa-line" and a glance at the telegrams at the club will see me through. [*In the doorway.*] I shall be on the platform at Victoria.

IRIS.

[*Gratefully.*] No, no ; you mustn't trouble.

CROKER.

[*With a quick look into her face.*] Trouble ! good heavens !

[*He disappears.*

LAURENCE.

[*Formally, as he shakes hands with her.*] Thank you for a most delightful evening.

IRIS.

So nice of you to come.

LAURENCE.

Good-night.

IRIS.

Good-night.

[*He withdraws.*

KANE.

[*Shaking hands with her.*] Shall we meet again before you run away?

IRIS.

Hardly.

KANE.

Well—a pleasant holiday!

IRIS.

And to you, Archie.

KANE.

[*Pausing in the doorway, dropping his voice.*] Once more, congratulations.

IRIS.

Thanks.

[*He goes. She closes the doors and turns, to find herself in MALDONADO'S arms.*

IRIS.

Ah, no!

MALDONADO.

At last !

IRIS.

Oh !

MALDONADO.

Sweetest !

IRIS.

Maldo ! [*Freeing herself with a gesture of repugnance.*]
Maldo !

[*She brushes past him, and stands, greatly ruffled, by the chair beside the writing-table. He regards her silently for a moment, puzzled.*]

MALDONADO.

[*After the silence.*] Oh, pardon me, my dear. The stored-up feelings of—a life-time, it seems—— ! It would be an exceedingly poor compliment to you were I less ardent.

[*She takes a bottle of salts from the writing-table and drops into the chair.*]

IRIS.

I—I am tired, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Brightening.*] Ah, naturally; and I most inconsiderate. [*Coming to the back of her chair.*] I was rough—savage. A woman should always find repose on the breast of her lover. [*Bending over her.*] Let me prove to you how gentle I can be,

IRIS.

Er—it is late, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece.*] Barely eleven. [*Turning to her.*] Late! [*Twisting his beard, thoughtfully.*] You who never leave the opera till the final bar is played——! [*Placing himself between her chair and the writing-table.*] But I won't plague you further. [*Sitting upon the edge of the table and inclining his body towards her.*] I only ask you to grant me one favour before you dismiss me to night.

IRIS.

Favour?

MALDONADO.

Bestow upon me the title I have coveted so long. It is comprised in a single word. The faintest movement of those beautiful, still lips will suffice. You have but to whisper it to send me through the streets in air. Whisper!

IRIS.

What?

MALDONADO.

I am your beloved, am I not? Simply call me—Beloved.

IRIS.

We—we are not boy and girl, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

Boy! I! no. [*His eyes glowering.*] A boy is not

scorched-up, body and soul, by such a passion as you inspire me with. [*She rises, turning from him.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Also rising, apologetically.*] Ah, I scare you again! You'll think me a hot-blooded tyrant. Don't fear; it is merely for the moment—the suddenness of my delight——! Besides, you must make some small allowance for me; we Maldonados are not yet wholly English in our ways. You shall complete my education. We'll begin the course of instruction at once—begin by my promptly leaving you to your slumbers. [*Taking her hand and crumpling it fondly.*] There! was there ever a more docile pupil? [*In an outburst, impulsively pressing her hand to his lips and covering it with passionate kisses.*] Ah, sweetest, be kind! melt! be warm! be warm!

IRIS.

[*Regaining possession of her hand.*] Maldo—listen! —Ma.do—I—I am dreadfully sorry. What I tell you now I ought to have told you before returning your ring—your token. Maldo, I haven't the love for you a woman should have for the man who is to be her husband; in that respect I am as you have always known me. But I will try to do my duty faithfully as mistress of your house, if that will satisfy you. I can promise no more, but I will do my duty—strictly and honourably, Maldo, strictly and honourably.

[*She moves away to the centre. He approaches her slowly.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At her side, his softness gone, speaking in a harsh, grating voice—swallowing an oath.*] By——! I should scarcely have thought it possible! Yes, you positively deceived me—the astute Freddy Maldonado! You've had me in a fool's paradise for nearly three hours.

IRIS.

Deceived——?

MALDONADO.

What an ass! I really imagined—for three mortal hours!—that it was reserved for me to escape the proverbial fate of the millionaire where the love of woman is concerned!

IRIS.

[*In protest.*] Maldo!

MALDONADO.

[*Sharply.*] Why are you marrying me, then? Eh? Why are you prepared to marry me?

IRIS.

You are very good, Maldo, very generous——

MALDONADO.

Ah, yes.

IRIS.

Amiability itself——

MALDONADO.

Quite so.

IRIS.

There is no man for whom I have sincerer respect ; none, Maldo, none.

MALDONADO.

Yes, yes ; all that. But I assume that the qualities you enumerate, admirable as they are, would hardly suffice to induce you to resign your own comfortable fortune were I not able to offer you a pretty solid exchange.

IRIS.

A woman, at such a crisis of her life, is swayed by many considerations, of course, Maldo. I am past the romantic age. You—you must think what you please ; I cannot defend myself.

[She sits upon the ottoman stonily. Leaving her, he walks about the room giving vent to short outbursts of ironical laughter. Ultimately he flings himself on to the settee on the left.]

MALDONADO.

Ha, ha, ha ! Ho, ho ! *[His laughter dying out—bitterly.]* Why, I suppose I ought to be profoundly grateful to you for your candour. The generality of women—ha, ha ! And better now than subsequent to marriage ! And, after all, you give yourself to me—give yourself in a fashion ; in the only fashion, it may be—I must console myself with that—in the only fashion in which your temperament allows you to yield yourself. Come, I can't lose you utterly, my dear. I'll be a philosopher and say Thanks. Thanks. *[Returning to her side.]* Thanks.

IRIS.

[*In a murmur.*] Thanks, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Grimly.*] It's a bargain, then? You to be mine; as much mine as the Velasquez, the Raphael, hanging on my walls—mine, at least, to gaze at, mine to keep from others? [*Her head droops in acquiescence.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Gradually regaining some part of his good-humour.*] And in return I promise that you shall be one of the most envied women in Europe. Oh, you shall attain your ambition; you shall realise what wealth is, steep yourself in it to your heart's content!

IRIS.

[*Rising, penitently.*] Maldo!

MALDONADO.

Tsch, my dear! I'll not reproach you. You are as God made women, and I—I am a millionaire. [*After a pause, during which she plays with her handkerchief helplessly.*] Well, I'll be gone. I fear I've gravely imperilled my character for amiability.

IRIS.

Oh——! [*Giving him her hand.*] Maldo——

MALDONADO.

Eh?

IRIS.

Perhaps—perhaps, as the years grow, it may become different between us.

MALDONADO.

[*Gripping her hand.*] Iris !

IRIS.

[*Hastily.*] Good-night.

MALDONADO.

[*Devouring her with his eyes.*] My—my queen !
[*Drawing a deep breath.*] I take my luck !

[*He releases her, and she goes to the bell beside the fireplace and rings it.*

MALDONADO.

[*At the door.*] Will you be in to me in the morning ?

IRIS.

Yes.

MALDONADO.

A thousand apologies for keeping you up. Good-night.

IRIS.

Good-night, Maldo.

[*He departs. With a cry, half of pain, half of weariness, she throws herself at full length upon the settee, and the curtain falls. After a brief pause it rises, disclosing the rooms empty and in darkness, and the window-shutters and the shutters of the*

conservatory doors closed and barred. A key turns in its lock and one of the double-doors is opened gently, and IRIS enters, followed by LAURENCE TRENWITH. She motions him to pass her, and carefully closes the door. Then she switches on the light of a lamp standing upon the table on the left and, silently and impassively, seats herself upon the window-stool. Having deposited his hat and overcoat upon the settee on the right, he comes to her and, throwing himself upon his knees before her, clasps her waist. She remains statue-like, her arms hanging by her side, looking down upon him with fixed eyes.

LAURENCE.

I can't help it! Pity me! Forgive me for being so daring. Remember, in the future I have to live upon my recollection of you—my recollection of how near I have been to you. To-night will stand out more distinctly than all the rest. You'll kiss me to-night, won't you—let me kiss you! [*She raises her hands to shield her face.*] For once, just for once! Ah, you'll not allow me to go without a kiss at parting! Picture me in my solitary little log-hut, alone after the day's work—twelve miles away from the nearest house, from the nearest companionable creature—and think what the memory of a single kiss will always mean to me. Oh, don't hide your face! Are you angry? Remove your hands! You *are* angry. I won't kiss you, then; I won't try to kiss you.

[He attempts to uncover her face, whereupon she rises. He rises with her. There is silence between them for a while.]

IRIS.

[At length, controlling herself with an effort.]
Laurence—my poor friend—I have promised to marry Mr. Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[Almost inaudibly.] What!

IRIS.

Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[Dully.] When——?

IRIS.

When did I make the promise?

LAURENCE.

Y—yes.

IRIS.

To-night—last night, that is. It is past twelve, isn't it?

LAURENCE.

Yes.

[He turns from her unsteadily and sinks upon the ottoman, his head bowed, his shoulders shaking convulsively.]

IRIS.

[At his side.] Don't! don't! be strong! What difference can it make?

LAURENCE.

To me? None, I suppose. Oh, yes, yes, all the difference.

IRIS.

How——?

LAURENCE.

There would have been the hope. There would have been the hope.

IRIS.

Hope?

LAURENCE.

[*Mastering his emotion, and looking up at her.*] In spite of everything, I should have gone away with the hope that, some day, if I prosper, you would bid me come home to fetch you. And now—Mr. Maldonado. [*Rising.*] I beg your pardon; I ought to offer you my——

IRIS.

Thank you.

LAURENCE.

[*Gazing at her.*] You and Mr. Maldonado! I should hardly have—[*checking himself.*] I trust you will be extremely——

[*He fetches his hat and coat and returns to her.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Brokenly.*] Of course, under the altered circumstances I won't think of troubling you with letters.

IRIS.

Perhaps it would be as well that you should not

write, for a time at least. I shall never cease to be interested in your career. [*Losing some of her composure.*] Oh, you might have disguised it more thoroughly!

LAURENCE.

Disguised——?

IRIS.

Your astonishment at my marrying Mr. Maldonado. [*Feebly.*] He has loved me—he asked me to be his wife two years ago. And to-night I—quite suddenly—[*in an altered tone*] Do you know that you and I were beginning to be the subject of tittle-tattle?

LAURENCE.

You and I?

IRIS.

Gossip.

LAURENCE.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh!

IRIS.

Scandal.

LAURENCE.

How dare people? Good heavens! to think I have brought this upon you! What an infamous world!

[*She shrugs her shoulders, smiling miserably.*]

LAURENCE.

Oh——! [*Going to the mantelpiece and leaning upon it.*] Oh, it's a dastardly world!

IRIS.

I didn't mean to add to your unhappiness. I only

wished you to understand exactly what has occurred.

LAURENCE.

[*Turning to her.*] But now I am going away. That in itself will stop evil tongues. There is no necessity now for you to take this step, if you are taking it merely to stop scandal.

[*She sits, silently, upon the ottoman. Throwing his hat and coat aside, he kneels upon the settee and, bending over it, speaks almost into her ear.*

LAURENCE.

Don't do this! don't! don't! There's no reason for it. You sha'n't! you shall not!

IRIS.

I must.

LAURENCE.

Not Maldonado!

IRIS.

I must.

LAURENCE.

Not the man I met here to-night!

IRIS.

[*Seizing his hands and holding them, in entreaty.*]
Laurence——!

LAURENCE.

What?

IRIS.

I am totally unfit for the life you ask me to lead!

LAURENCE.

The life——?

IRIS.

Your wife—a farmer's wife—mistress of a log-hut—to work with my hands! I dare not!

LAURENCE.

Iris——!

IRIS.

Out there, here, anywhere, I am not fit to be a poor man's wife.

LAURENCE.

Iris——!

IRIS.

No, no, no; I will not.

LAURENCE.

You are marrying him to save yourself from me!

IRIS.

[*Faintly.*] Oh!

[*Her head drops back until it rests upon the edge of the settee. With a cry he presses a prolonged kiss upon her lips. She rises, her eyes closed, her hand pressed tightly upon her mouth.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Guiltily.*] You'll despise me for that, always have a contempt for me.

[*After a pause, during which she is quite still, she moves to the writing-table and, seating*

herself before it, switches on the light of a lamp standing upon the table.

IRIS.

[*In a whisper.*] Laurence——

[*She selects a sheet of notepaper and writes, he looking on wonderingly. When she has finished her note she blots it, and hands it to him, and proceeds to address an envelope.*

IRIS.

Read it. What have I said ?

LAURENCE.

[*Reading.*] “Forget what has passed between us to-night. It cannot be. I entreat your forgiveness.”

[*He returns the paper and she encloses it. Then she rises and, taking some flowers from a vase, moistens the envelope with the wet stalks. Having fastened the letter by pressing it with her handkerchief, she gives it to*
LAURENCE.

IRIS.

Let a messenger leave that at Mr. Maldonado's house in Mount Street before nine o'clock.

LAURENCE.

[*Pocketing the letter.*] Iris—— !

[*She leaves him, with uncertain steps, and sinks upon the settee facing the fireplace. He follows her.*

LAURENCE.

[*Standing before her.*] What do you mean?

IRIS.

[*Half rising.*] I—I don't care! Follow me to Switzerland. Be near me——

[*She stretches out her arms to him, and they sit together in an embrace. The curtain falls.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

The scene represents an apartment in a villa standing upon elevated ground running up from the west bank of the Lake of Como. The room, quadrantal in shape, is a spacious and lofty one. Its walls, decorated in slight relief, and its pilasters are of the purest white plaster. On the right-hand side of the room the wall is straight; in it, deeply recessed, are double-doors admitting to a hall; while the circular wall is broken by three vast windows, opening to the floor, at equal distances from each other. Outside these windows runs a balcony, the termination of which, at either end, is out of sight. Beyond the balcony are the tops of the trees—palms, magnolia in blossom, and others—growing in the garden below; and in the distance, under a deep blue sky, lie Bellagio and the juncture of the Lake of Como with that of Lecco. The furniture and hangings of the apartment—in contrast to the lightness of its decorations—are French, of the time of the first Empire. By the further window, which is open, stand a settee and a writing-table and chair. Near the door is a circular table covered with a white tablecloth and partially laid for a meal, and on each side of this table is a

chair so placed as to suggest that the meal in preparation is for two persons. A cabinet standing against the wall serves as a sideboard; on it are dishes of fruit, decanters of wine, table-glass, etc. etc. On the other side of the room, by the nearer window, half of which is open, is another table littered with newspapers, magazines and books. On the left-hand side of this table is a settee; on the right a chair; and upon the floor, between the chair and the settee, are a heap of cushions, some loose sheets of music, and a guitar. A piece of sculpture fills the right-hand corner of the room, and some busts on pedestals occupy the spaces between the windows. On the balcony there are two or three chairs in basketwork and, outside the middle window, standing upon the broad ledge of the balustrade, several cages of birds.

The light is that of a brilliantly fine morning in September. The sun enters through the nearer window; the rest of the balcony is in shade.

[Two servants—a man and a woman—are engaged in laying the table near the doors for déjeuner. FANNY SYLVAIN and AUREA—dressed for walking—appear on the balcony, at the further window, coming from the right.

FANNY.

Good-morning.

MAN-SERVANT and WOMAN-SERVANT.

Good-morning, miss.

FANNY.

[*Entering.*] Mrs. Bellamy is out, the gardener tells me.

MAN-SERVANT.

Yes, miss. She has gone for a walk to Tremezzo.

FANNY.

I wonder I didn't meet her. Alone?

MAN-SERVANT.

No, miss; with Mr. Trenwith.

FANNY.

[*Shortly.*] Oh.

MAN-SERVANT.

Mr. Trenwith is sketching at Tremezzo, miss.

FANNY.

[*Displaying no further interest.*] Really?

MAN-SERVANT.

Mrs. Bellamy breakfasts at twelve, miss, so she can't be long.

FANNY.

[*Taking a magazine from the table on the left and seating herself on the settee by the nearer window.*] I'll wait a little while. [*To AUREA, who has followed her into the room.*] We'll wait, Aurea.

AUREA.

[*Sitting on the settee by the further window.*] I could gaze at this prospect for ever, aunt.

[*The woman-servant withdraws at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT.

[To FANNY.] Mr. 'Arrington is also waiting for Mrs. Bellamy, miss. I b'lieve you're acquainted with Mr. 'Arrington?

FANNY.

Mr. Croker Harrington!

MAN-SERVANT.

He came down last night from Promontogno. He's staying at Menaggio.

FANNY.

[*Rising.*] Where is he now?

MAN-SERVANT.

He's strolling about the garden, I fancy.

FANNY.

[*Gladly.*] Mr. Harrington has arrived, Aurea.

AUREA.

Has he, aunt?

FANNY.

[*Going out at the nearer window and looking down from the balcony into the garden.*] Isn't that he, by the fountain? [*Moving to the further end of the balcony as she calls.*] Croker! Cro—ker! [*Waving her sunshade.*] Croker! [*Re-entering the room.*] How jolly, Aurea—dear Croker!

AUREA.

[*Who is now standing by the table on the left—in a*

low voice.] Do you think all this pleases Mrs. Bellamy, aunt?

FANNY.

All this——?

AUREA.

Her friends chasing her, as it must seem, from place to place while she is on her holiday.

FANNY.

[*Somewhat disconcerted.*] Why, it delights her, naturally.

AUREA.

It wouldn't me [*awkwardly*] if I wanted——

FANNY.

Wanted—what?

AUREA.

Rest—and seclusion.

[*The woman-servant reappears, showing in CROKER HARRINGTON; then she and her fellow-servant retire.*

CROKER.

[*Kissing FANNY's hand.*] My dearest Fanny!

FANNY.

Croker!

CROKER.

[*Advancing to AUREA and shaking hands with her.*] My dear Miss Vyse! Ladies, your appearance on a day already sufficiently brilliant is overpowering. [*Opening a white umbrella which he is carrying, and*

holding it before him.] Remove your eyes from me, I entreat; they rob me of the shade!

FANNY.

What a fool you are, Croker! So you've turned up?

CROKER.

[Shutting his umbrella.] Last night.

FANNY.

You're at Menaggio?

CROKER.

You divine my most secret movements—at the Victoria. And you——?

FANNY.

[With a jerk of the head towards the right.] We're at the Belle Vue, Aurea and I.

CROKER.

Spick, span, comfortable Belle Vue! *[To FANNY, his hand upon his heart.]* But I daren't trust myself in too close a proximity——

FANNY.

[Striking him gently with her sunshade.] Idiot! Have you paid your devotions to our Divinity yet?

CROKER.

Not yet; it was too late to do so last night. You see much of her, of course?

FANNY.

[*Constrainedly.*] I've been here only a week. Yes, I see her for a few minutes every day.

CROKER.

A few minutes?

FANNY.

She's a good deal occupied.

CROKER.

Occupied?

FANNY.

[*Dryly.*] Sketching.

CROKER.

Sketching!

FANNY.

Aurea dear, the sun is off the front of the house. If you kept watch, you might run and meet Iris when she appears.

AUREA.

[*Obediently.*] Yes, aunt.

[*She goes out, at the nearer window, and talks to the birds. FANNY crosses over to the window and closes it.*

FANNY.

[*Turning to him.*] What were we——?

CROKER.

I was about to commit myself to the observation that Iris doesn't sketch.

FANNY.

No, but Mr. Trenwith does.

CROKER.

[*Unconcernedly.*] Oh—ah—yes. Is Mr. Trenwith at Cadenabbia?

FANNY.

At the Britannia.

CROKER.

[*In the same spirit.*] H'm, h'm?

FANNY.

A few hundred yards from this villa.

[*There is a pause between them, during which he employs himself in idly turning over the newspapers upon the table on the left.*]

FANNY.

[*Seating herself on the settee by the further window.*] You were at St. Moritz during her stay there, you wrote and told me?

CROKER.

For a fortnight.

FANNY.

Mr. Trenwith happened to be there also, didn't he?

CROKER.

Yes.

FANNY.

[*Impatiently.*] He is regularly in her train.

CROKER.

Oh, hardly more than I, if it comes to that.

FANNY.

But he is young, charming, attractive in every way——

[*He throws his head back and laughs almost too uproariously.*]

FANNY.

[*Jumping up and coming to him penitently.*] I beg your pardon, Croker. You misunderstood me. Oh, be quiet! What I should have said was—one could wish that Miss Pinsent's successor were of another sex. Why was Miss Pinsent given her *congé* just before Iris left London? A pleasant, suitable person for a companion, surely! Wouldn't you consider her so?

CROKER.

I might consider her so.

FANNY.

[*Moving away.*] Don't be coarse. I had a letter last week from Evelyn Littledale. The Littledales were at St. Moritz, too. [*He nods in assent.*] Everybody was talking, Evelyn says.

CROKER.

Talking! What else is there to do at St. Moritz?

FANNY.

And here——

CROKER.

Here ?

FANNY.

It is the same here. Everybody is talking.

CROKER.

The glass is falling. Two days of rain and the place will be empty.

FANNY.

People will carry the topic away with them. [*Leaning upon the back of the chair on the left of the breakfast-table.*] Mary Chadwick writes me from Scotland ; *she* mentions it.

CROKER.

Pretty, bony, pimply Polly Chadwick !

FANNY.

It came to her from London. It has been brought to London already.

CROKER.

The only form of luggage that escapes a charge for excess.

FANNY.

You are too sententious ! [*At the breakfast-table, suddenly.*] Are you breakfasting with Iris ?

CROKER.

[*Joining her.*] She doesn't know I've arrived.

FANNY.

Because I notice the table is laid for two. [*On his*

left.] For mercy's sake, man, do show some signs of animation ! You can be sprightly enough at times.

CROKER.

My dear Fanny, to what tune would you have me skip ?

FANNY.

Why, astonishment—astonishment, at least, at our Divinity's extraordinary behaviour.

CROKER.

Is it extraordinary ?

FANNY.

Can you find a milder phrase for it ? I tell you, Croker, I can't sleep for worrying about Iris. When we were in town, and young Trenwith was fluttering round her, I was in a blue funk lest she should be tempted to marry him and plunge herself into poverty. But now—well, I sometimes catch myself wishing that she would announce her engagement to him. [*Leaving CROKER and peering at AUREA through the centre window.*] My niece, too ! I am certain she is beginning to wonder. [*Seating herself by the table on the left.*] What on earth are we to think of it all ?

CROKER.

Think ? That here are two well-intentioned young people with a natural fondness for each other's society. What else, pray, is there to think ?

FANNY.

Oh, thanks, I appreciate the snub.

CROKER.

Best natured of your sex, I intend no snub. Bring me the man who presumes to snub you and I will slay him in your presence. No, no, I would only suggest to those who are disturbing you by their gossip that it is simply abominable that close companionships can't exist between reputable men and women without suspicion of wickedness. Faugh! why must this dear friend of ours be fastened upon? Cannot she be spared—a refined, delicate creature whose natural pride and dignity queens might envy? Oh, a little spoilt, if you will; petted by those who have the privilege of intimacy with her; luxurious in her habits, a born spendthrift, but never more prodigal—bless her!—than in her charities! I can remember little else to urge against her—except the difficulties of her position, none of her own making. She mustn't re-marry—that is, she may not marry whom she pleases. In heaven's name, is she to be gagged and manacled for that reason? She is still young—yes; yet from the fact of her already having been a wife—brief as was the duration of that experience—she can't be altogether an unwise woman. Is she not to be trusted to give wholesome counsel to a young man without the interruption of a chaperon; is she never to play at mothering—like a sage child with a doll—a male companion belonging to her own generation? And this young fellow, this Trenwith? Is he necessarily an abandoned wretch? I like him. I wish I were in his shoes—better still, in his skin! I say is youth necessarily designing, necessarily vicious? I'll back it against age; and age isn't all bad, I console myself with believing, as I pull out a grey hair or two

every morning. [*Pacing the room.*] Phuh! it nauseates me even to argue the matter. [*Sitting, on the left of the breakfast-table.*] Have you ventured to speak to Iris on the subject?

FANNY.

Not yet. I keep putting it off from day to day.

CROKER.

Why—feeling as strongly as you do?

FANNY.

I suppose I shrink from seeing a pair of placid, grey eyes turn on me with a look of surprise and reproach.

CROKER.

[*Triumphantly.*] Ha!

FANNY.

Oh, of course I know they will look so, and leave me to splutter out of my difficulty like a puppy who has been dropped into a pond. Yes, yes, of course, Croker, in my heart I know she is only foolish—foolish—foolish.

CROKER.

I won't admit even that; only that other people are malicious—malicious—malicious.

FANNY.

[*Going to him and laying a hand on his shoulder.*] What a friend you are!

CROKER.

Is there any other rôle for an ugly little devil to play in this world?

FANNY.

The friendship of a single man is worth that of a dozen women. [*Uneasily.*] I believe that if our Divinity really behaved as she has been doing in my nightmares——

CROKER.

[*Looking up at her.*] Your nightmares?

FANNY.

[*Avoiding his gaze.*] I believe you'd stick to her even then.

CROKER.

[*Under his breath.*] Good God, yes!

FANNY.

Through any disgrace?

CROKER.

Till death. My dear Fanny, please don't imagine such impossible contingencies. [*Abruptly.*] And you?

FANNY.

Ah, there's the difference between men and women. I should drop quietly away.

CROKER.

Would you?

FANNY.

Goodness knows I'm not strait-laced, Croker; but one daren't let one's laces get too slack. [*Sadly.*] Yes, I should simply have to drop away quietly. What an end——!

CROKER.

[*Rising.*] Don't let us talk in this fashion.

FANNY.

[*Rousing herself.*] No, no. [*Recovering her spirits.*] As a matter of fact, your homily has comforted me tremendous'y—though you did snarl at me like a griffin.

CROKER.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha, ha!

FANNY.

But you don't object to my whispering just *one* word of warning into that little pink ear of hers, when an opportunity occurs, eh?

CROKER.

On the contrary——

AUREA.

[*Looking in at the further window.*] She is coming, aunt.

[*AUREA disappears quickly. One of the caged birds bursts into song.*]

FANNY.

Hark!

CROKER.

[*On the left.*] Eh?

FANNY.

Listen to that silly bird. It's the same with me—always has been; my heart thumps—thumps—thumps—whenever she approaches. And with you?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] Yes. What is she looking like?

FANNY.

Oh, fresher for the soft air of this place—more colour.

CROKER.

Her paleness is wonderfully becoming, though.

FANNY.

[*Smiling.*] When you met her at St. Moritz, did you notice she had lost some of those little lines we saw last season?

CROKER.

They were going. [*Regretfully.*] I missed them. They were nothing but dimples.

FANNY.

And her smile—[*Breaking off suddenly and coming to him.*] Croker——

CROKER.

Yes?

FANNY.

[*Her troubled manner returning.*] I'll tell you what

she looks like—[*irritably*] what a noise that bird makes! I'll tell you; I should describe her as looking exactly like—[*with an uncomfortable laugh*] it's the effect of this enchanted lake, I suppose——

CROKER.

Exactly like——?

FANNY.

[*Again avoiding his eye.*] A bride.

[*IRIS enters at the door, her arm through AUREA'S. She is dressed in white, and is happier-looking and more girlish than when last seen. LAURENCE follows, carrying his sketch-book.*

IRIS.

[*Uttering a cry of pleasure upon seeing CROKER.*] Ah! [*Kissing FANNY.*] Dear Fanny! [*Advancing to CROKER with extended hands.*] Aurea promised me a surprise, but not this!

CROKER.

[*Kissing her hands.*] What are you—the spirit of the lake?

IRIS.

No; something warmer to her friends. The lake is deep and cold, and occasionally cruel.

[*FANNY has greeted LAURENCE rather distantly; he now comes to CROKER.*

CROKER.

[*Shaking hands with him cordially.*] How are you, Mr. Trenwith?

LAURENCE.

[*Brightly.*] When did you come down?

CROKER.

Yesterday.

IRIS.

[*To CROKER.*] Mr. Trenwith is staying at the Britannia. He has been kind enough to let me watch him sketching at Tremezzo this morning. [*Removing her hat and veil with FANNY'S assistance.*] And you?

CROKER.

I'm at Menaggio—the Victoria.

IRIS.

A mile away from me. How churlish! [*Laying a hand on CROKER and FANNY.*] Still, this is reunion. You'll all breakfast with me, won't you? Mr. Trenwith has already promised. Yes?

FANNY.

Certainly, dear.

CROKER.

[*Depositing his hat and umbrella upon the settee on the left.*] Glorious! A hundred affirmatives.

AUREA.

[*To IRIS.*] Oh, I'm disgusted! I am engaged to lunch with the Battersbys and to go with them this afternoon, on the steamboat, to the Villa d'Este.

FANNY.

Yes, and I too ! But they will readily release an old woman.

AUREA.

[*Referring to her watch.*] I ought to be at the hotel now.

FANNY.

I'll take Aurea back, make my excuses, and return.

CROKER.

[*Taking up his hat and umbrella.*] Let me be your escort.

FANNY.

No, no.

CROKER.

I insist. [*To IRIS.*] At what time do you breakfast ?

IRIS.

It shall be delayed till half-past twelve. [*To AUREA.*] You will come to see me again—to-morrow perhaps ?

AUREA.

[*Assenting.*] I shall hate the steamboat, and the Villa d'Este, and the Battersbys—and they're such nice people.

FANNY.

[*Going out with AUREA.*] Half-past twelve, then !

CROKER.

[*Following them.*] With the fiercest of appetites.

FANNY and CROKER.

*Au revoir !**[They depart.]*

IRIS.

[Pulling the bell-rope which hangs by the door.] Au revoir ! *[The Man-servant appears in the doorway.]*

IRIS.

[To the servant.] Tell François there will be two more persons for *déjeuner*, and to delay it half an hour.

MAN-SERVANT.

Yes, ma'am.

[He withdraws, closing the doors. IRIS and LAURENCE approach each other. They converse in low, tender tones.]

IRIS.

[To LAURENCE.] We lose our *tête-à-tête*. But they are my dearest friends.

LAURENCE.

I understand.

IRIS.

Others may gossip about me, shut their eyes at me eventually if they choose. But these two—I don't believe the comments occasioned by our being so constantly together will ever deprive me of their fidelity, do you ?

LAURENCE.

[Doubtfully.] I sometimes fear that Miss Sylvain——

IRIS.

[*With a gesture of abandonment.*] Ah! [*Drawing still closer to him.*] Anyhow I have what is most precious. [*Indicating the sketch-book which he retains in his hand.*] Show me your morning's work.

LAURENCE.

[*Exhibiting a page deprecatingly.*] There's little to show.

IRIS.

For shame! And I was reading intently nearly the whole of the time in order not to distract you.

LAURENCE.

True—but my eyes were wandering towards your face nearly the whole of the time.

IRIS.

How foolish! Were they? [*In his ear.*] I know they were.

[*With a childlike laugh of pleasure she flings her hat away from her, in the direction of the settee by the further window, and sinks on to the cushions on the left. The hat falls upon the floor; he picks it up.*]

IRIS.

[*Carelessly.*] Oh, my pretty hat! [*Seeing that he is concerned over its trimmings.*] It's of no consequence.

LAURENCE.

[*Placing the hat and his sketch-book upon the writing-*

table.] It is one of the hats that came from Paris yesterday.

IRIS.

[*Taking the guitar upon her lap.*] Is it? So it is.

[*She thumbs the guitar. He comes to her slowly, contemplating her with a troubled look.*

LAURENCE.

Dearest——

IRIS.

Eh? Where's your mandoline?

LAURENCE.

I left it in the garden last night, I'm afraid.

IRIS.

Careless person! Send for it.

LAURENCE.

[*Sitting in the chair which is near her.*] Dearest, tell me—have you always been as I have known you?

IRIS.

Always—as you have known me——?

LAURENCE.

Profuse—extravagant——?

IRIS.

I? Oh, yes, always; from childhood, I've been told. Why? You have asked me something to that effect before, Laurie.

LAURENCE.

Forgive me——

IRIS.

Yes, it's in my blood, the very core of my nature, I believe.

LAURENCE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] To be lavish—reckless——

IRIS.

Reckless? You said extravagant.

LAURENCE.

Is there much difference?

IRIS.

Between recklessness and mere personal extravagance—indulgence? Oh, yes, indeed, indeed. There is courage in recklessness—blind courage, but courage; an absence of calculation, no thought of self whatever. And recklessness implies energy, determination, of a kind. But I—your poor Iris——! Do fetch your mandoline.

LAURENCE.

No, no; talk about yourself.

IRIS.

Your poor, weak, sordid Iris, who must lie in the sun in summer, before the fire in winter, who must wear the choicest lace, the richest furs; whose eyes must never encounter any but the most beautiful objects—languid, slothful, nerveless, incapable almost

of effort! Do you remember the story of the poet Thomson, and the peaches? He adored peaches, but was too greedy to await their appearance at table and too indolent to pluck them himself; so he used to stand propped-up against the wall upon which they grew and, with half-closed lids, bite into his beloved fruit as it hung from its tree. [*Plaintively.*] Ha, ha, ha! No image could give you a better notion of my habits and disposition.

LAURENCE.

Dearest, you blacken yourself wilfully.

IRIS.

Reckless! reckless! Why, were I a reckless woman, Laurie, we should now be man and wife, should we not?

LAURENCE.

[*In low, earnest tones, bending over her.*] Man and wife.

IRIS.

[*Wistfully, looking into space.*] Man and wife.

LAURENCE.

Man and wife! married! no one in the world to look askance at us!

IRIS.

Yes, we should have hurried off to church and begged a clergyman to turn a rich woman into a pauper; and you would have been saddled with a helpless doll stripped of her gewgaws and finery—if I had been simply reckless.

LAURENCE.

We should have been happy, dearest ; we should have been happy.

IRIS.

[*Incredulously.*] Even then ?

LAURENCE.

[*Eagerly.*] Even then.

IRIS.

[*Catching a little of his eagerness.*] What ! happier, do you think, than we are merely as lovers ?

LAURENCE.

I believe so ; in spite of your mistrust of yourself, I believe so.

IRIS.

[*Relapsing into languor, her fingers straying over the strings of the guitar.*] Oh, of course I know it would have been better for our souls could I have grappled with the problem honestly and courageously—married you and gone out to—what is the name of the place—— ?

LAURENCE.

River Rancho—Chilcote—

IRIS.

That, or parted from you for ever. But, you see, I hadn't the recklessness on the one hand nor the power of self-denial on the other. And so I treat your love as the poet did the fruit—I steal it ; greedily and

lazily I steal it. [*Laying her guitar aside with a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah—h—h! However, we're contented as we are, aren't we? [*Closing her eyes.*] I am; I am.

[*They remain silent for a few moments, he staring at the floor with knitted brows. Suddenly she puts her hair back from her forehead and rises.*]

IRIS.

Phew! it's very oppressive this morning.

[*She passes him, walking away towards the right and there standing idly.*]

LAURENCE.

[*After a pause, heavily.*] Dearest——

IRIS.

Laurie?

LAURENCE.

Naturally you wonder why I am continually catechising you about yourself.

IRIS.

You enjoy diving down into the depths of my character—is that it? Cruel, when they are such shallow little depths! [*Pitifully.*] The process disturbs the surface of me—makes ripples, as it were.

LAURENCE.

[*Rising and going to her.*] Yes, my persistency must seem terribly ill-bred. [*Hesitatingly.*] But it's all part of my anxiety concerning the future.

IRIS

IRIS.

The future?

LAURENCE.

Our future.

IRIS.

Why, what is on your mind?

LAURENCE.

[*Gently.*] Iris, things can't continue as they are.

IRIS.

[*With a note of alarm in her voice.*] Eh? What has happened?

LAURENCE.

[*Soothingly.*] Nothing—nothing. Only—I hate to be obliged to talk to you in this strain—I have to deal with the old question once more.

IRIS.

The old question?

LAURENCE.

A means of livelihood.

IRIS.

[*With wide-open eyes.*] A means of livelihood!

LAURENCE.

You remember that when, six weeks ago, I wrote to my uncle, telling him I was hanging-up for a while the idea of leaving England, he sent me, generously enough, his good wishes and a cheque for five hundred pounds?

IRIS.

Yes.

LAURENCE.

At the same time his letter conveyed a very decided intimation that I was neither to see him nor hear from him again.

IRIS.

I read Archdeacon Standish's note.

LAURENCE.

It is evident I can look for nothing further in that direction.

IRIS.

Quite. What does that matter ?

LAURENCE.

[*Avoiding her gaze.*] Therefore, those five hundred pounds—or, rather, what remains of them—represent all I have with which to——

IRIS.

To—— ?

LAURENCE.

To commence operations.

IRIS.

Operations ?

LAURENCE.

Work.

IRIS.

Where ?

LAURENCE.

Out there.

IRIS.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Laurie !

LAURENCE.

Through my delay I have lost the chance of taking over Eardley's ranche at Chilcoten, even if I possessed the capital. But the other scheme remains.

IRIS.

The other ?

LAURENCE.

Joining Fred Bagot. He's five-and-twenty miles nearer to Soda Creek, you know, where there's a post-office and all sorts of civilisation. I could pay him the premium he asks—two hundred and fifty—and peg away with a view to a partnership. The second plan might prove as good in the end as the original one.

IRIS.

[*Breathlessly.*] Laurie !

LAURENCE.

Dearest !

IRIS.

Laurie, why are you teasing me ?

LAURENCE.

Teasing you ?

IRIS.

Reviving the notion of that terrible ranche !

LAURENCE.

Iris, it is the one career I am fitted for. I should succeed at it; I feel I should succeed at it.

IRIS.

But there is no longer any necessity for it! The project belongs to the past! [*He attempts to speak; she interrupts him.*] Oh, we have hitherto avoided the subject of money matters, Laurence—it is such a distasteful topic as between you and me. Dear, you shall never again have the smallest care about money; I want you to regard your embarrassments as absolutely at an end. It is unkind of you to have kept your anxieties from me in this way.

LAURENCE.

Iris—Iris—you don't understand.

IRIS.

What else——?

LAURENCE.

You don't understand that a man—some men, at least; I among the number—can't accept money from a woman.

IRIS.

[*Blankly.*] Why not?

LAURENCE.

Become dependent upon a woman! [*Walking away and sitting upon the settee by the nearer window.*] Live upon a woman!

IRIS.

[*Following him and standing at the back of the settee.*] But—the circumstances——! We love each other.

LAURENCE.

[*With clenched hands.*] Does that make the situation easier for me? Iris, the position would be intolerable.

IRIS.

No, no.

LAURENCE.

Intolerable. Intolerable.

[*She leaves him and wanders away to the breakfast-table, where she sits plucking at the leaves of some of the flowers which decorate the table. He rises, walks to the further window, looks out, and then joins her.*

LAURENCE.

[*Remorsefully.*] I know I'm cruel, dearest. But it's of a piece with the rest of my behaviour; I've been cruel to you from the very beginning.

IRIS.

Never till now.

LAURENCE.

Yes, I ought to have been strong; I ought to have constituted myself your protector. I ought to have said good-bye to you finally on the night of your dinner-party.

IRIS.

I forgive you all that. That was my fault. But now——!

LAURENCE.

[*Partly to himself.*] One could have done it if one had chosen. I simply allowed the current to carry both of us away.

IRIS.

Why should we try to escape from the current? We love each other; we've been happy; we *are* happy. Why aren't you satisfied to be one of my birds—oh, but my best, my most dearly prized? Just for a scruple——!

LAURENCE.

Scruple!

IRIS.

[*Suddenly.*] Laurence, directly we return to London I will see Archie Kane and insist upon his obtaining some suitable occupation for you in town. I will! He and I have already talked over the matter. He mentioned a secretaryship as being possible.

LAURENCE.

I know—the sort of billet that provides a man with gloves and cab fares, and a flower for his coat! [*Entreatingly.*] Iris—Iris, I don't ask you any longer to share the difficulties I must meet with at the outset—a novice starting life on a ranche. But afterwards, when the struggle is over, when affairs settle down into their steady course——!

IRIS.

Their steady course! [*Rising.*] That's it! Their steady course! [*Shudderingly.*] Oh, don't, don't!

[*She goes to the settee by the further window and throws herself upon it, burying her face in the pillows. He follows her.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Standing behind the settee and bending over her.*] Iris! Dearest! Listen! If all went well with me, it wouldn't be hardship and a bare home I could welcome you to. Within a few years there would be comforts, pretty walls to gaze at, servants to wait upon you——!

IRIS.

[*Looking up piteously.*] Two Chinamen—or three? An extra boy to maid me? Oh, Laurie!

LAURENCE.

The Chinese are excellent servants. Eardley describes them in one of his letters——

[*Raising herself so that she kneels upon the settee, she puts her hands upon his shoulders.*]

IRIS.

Another time! Let us discuss the point thoroughly another time. Laurie! Another time!

LAURENCE.

When?

IRIS.

When we leave here. We are happy. Look!

how blue the sky and the lake are ! Dear, life will never be quite like this again. After we have left this place !

LAURENCE.

[*Irresolutely.*] If I say Yes——?

IRIS.

[*With a cry of delight.*] Ah !

LAURENCE.

[*Warningly.*] Dearest, your term here expires in a fortnight.

IRIS.

I can continue it for another month.

LAURENCE.

Another month—— !

IRIS.

Hush ! hush ! you have promised. I have your promise ; I have your promise——

[*There is the sound of voices in the distance.*]

IRIS.

[*Releasing him and listening.*] Fanny and Croker !
[*Pressing her hands to her eyes.*] My face—— !

[*She goes out quickly, at the door. He walks about in thought, his head bowed, his hands deep in his pockets. Coming upon the guitar, he picks it up, sits, and twangs its strings discordantly. At length, the voices growing nearer, he lays the guitar aside*]

and interests himself with the magazines.
FANNY and CROKER enter at the further window, talking.

FANNY.

Yes, quite an unexpected encounter.

CROKER.

Where does he hail from—I didn't gather——?

FANNY.

From Aix. I recognised his back instantly.

CROKER.

You can claim no credit for that; it's the most prosperous-looking back in Europe.

FANNY.

[To LAURENCE.] If this invasion continues, Mrs. Bellamy will be driven from Cadenabbia by her friends, Mr. Trenwith.

[IRIS returns, unnoticed, outwardly composed and placid.]

LAURENCE.

[Politely.] Only by a desire to follow them when they depart. Who is the new arrival, may I ask?

FANNY.

Mr. Frederick Maldonado.

IBIS.

Ah ! [*They all turn towards her.*] Of whom are you talking ?

FANNY.

Our great friend—in every sense of the word—
Freddy Maldonado.

CROKER.

We met him a few minutes ago in the hall of the
Belle Vue.

IRIS.

[*Calmly.*] Oh, yes.

FANNY.

He has just come from Milan. He has been at
Aix.

[*The servants enter, carrying a couple of light
chairs. They proceed to arrange the two
additional places at the table. The doors
are left open.*]

IRIS.

[*Advancing.*] Indeed ? Is he—well ?

FANNY.

If he is, he's far better than he looks. I thought
his appearance pretty shocking—didn't you, Croker ?

CROKER.

Let me see—did I ?

FANNY.

His colour ! What does his complexion resemble ?

I know—that delicious subcutaneous part of a wedding-cake! [*The men laugh.*] And his eyes! I suppose Aix has made him flabby—I've never seen such great, heavy—what d'ye call 'em?—pouches as he has under his eyes.

CROKER.

The accumulation of wealth. With him, even nature opens a deposit account.

FANNY.

[*After another laugh.*] Well, what a moral! These are the sights that reconcile one to the possession of a moderate income.

IRIS.

[*In a low voice, looking away.*] Poor Maldo!

FANNY.

Eh? Oh, of course, dear, I exaggerate, as usual. But you'll be able to judge for yourself; his first walk, naturally, will be taken in your direction.

IRIS.

[*Constrainedly.*] I—I hope so. [*Perceiving that the Man-servant is waiting to address her.*] Yes?

MAN-SERVANT.

Breakfast, ma'am.

IRIS.

[*At the table.*] Fanny, will you face me? [*To CROKER, indicating the chair on her right.*] Croker—[*to LAURENCE*] Mr. Trenwith——

[*They sit—IRIS with her back to the further*

window, the others in the positions assigned to them. The Woman-servant, who has previously withdrawn, now returns with a tray of various hors d'œuvres. The man takes the tray from her and presents it to those at the table, who help themselves and eat during the talk which follows. The woman retires.

IRIS.

This is delightful—delightful—delightful.

CROKER.

Beyond measure, dear lady.

IRIS.

Ah, but to have you and Fanny with me in these sweet surroundings!

[CROKER raises her hand to his lips chivalrously.

IRIS.

[Smiling.] Faithful One!

FANNY.

[Taking IRIS's disengaged hand, across the table.] Divinity!

IRIS.

Dear Fanny! [Looking at those around her, with a little sigh.] Ah, how many real, close friends can one hope to carry through life, if one is lucky, in spite of one's imperfections and infirmities! Has it ever been estimated?

FANNY.

Oh, yes—as many as you can count upon the fingers of your two hands, we are told.

LAURENCE.

Upon one hand would be a closer computation, I fancy.

CROKER.

You're right, Mr. Trenwith—barring the thumb.

IRIS.

That, at least, allows me four. I have three here.

LAURENCE.

You are very kind——

IRIS.

Ah, but remember, you are only a cadet, Mr. Trenwith. Mr. Harrington and Miss Sylvain are fully graduated.

LAURENCE.

I am honoured by the humblest position assigned to me.

FANNY.

There is still one finger unprovided for. Who is to be the fourth—the faithful fourth?

CROKER.

[*To IRIS.*] Yes, whom would you elect to accom-

pany us three to the vale of grey hairs and rheumatism ?

IRIS.

[*Reflecting.*] Whom—— ?

FANNY.

Freddy Maldonado ?

[*IRIS is silent, looking down upon her plate.*]

CROKER.

Archie Kane ?

FANNY.

Dear old Archie !

[*The Woman-servant enters with some letters and newspapers. She lays them on the table at IRIS's side and, taking the tray from the man, goes out. The man employs himself at the sideboard in mixing a salad.*]

IRIS.

[*To the woman.*] Thanks. [*To those at the table, apologetically.*] It is a habit of mine, when I am abroad, to clutch at my letters directly they arrive.

FANNY.

Unwise ! You may find a bill—a heavy one.

IRIS.

Ha, ha !

CROKER.

A splendid corrective—the skeleton at the feast !

IRIS.

Let us drown the thought. Fanny drinks white wine, Croker. That water is Mattoni.

[CROKER helps FANNY to wine from a decanter which has been transferred from the side-board to the table.]

IRIS.

[*Passing a decanter of red wine to LAURENCE.*] Mr. Trenwith—?

LAURENCE.

[*Taking up the decanter.*] May I——?

IRIS.

[*Pushing her glass towards him.*] A little. [*Observing the newspapers.*] The papers. I wonder whether the gossip contains news of poor Mrs. Wynning. [*Selecting a newspaper and handing it to CROKER.*] Do look, Croker.

CROKER.

Certainly.

[*He tears off the wrapper and opens the paper. The Woman-servant returns, carrying a dish of mayonnaise of fish which she deposits upon the sideboard. The man removes from the table the plates which have been used and replaces them with others. The woman again withdraws.*]

FANNY.

Mrs Wynning?

IRIS.

Haven't you heard? She was thrown from her dog-cart last week.

FANNY.

Oh!

IRIS.

She had driven to the station at Champness to meet her husband. Her horse wasn't broken to trains, evidently, and bolted.

FANNY.

She is badly hurt?

IRIS.

Terribly bruised and shaken, I fear. [*To CROKER.*]
Is there a paragraph?

CROKER.

[*Turning the paper.*] Not in the middle of the paper. There may be a footnote——

[*His eye is arrested by some matter in the paper and he reads silently and absorbedly.*]

IRIS.

[*Watching him.*] There is an announcement.

CROKER.

Y—yes.

IRIS.

[*Apprehensively.*] Not reassuring? [*After a pause.*]
Croker!

CROKER.

Extraordinary. Extraordinary.

FANNY.

Extraordinary?

[*Leaning towards him, she discovers the item of news which interests him.*]

FANNY.

[*Breathlessly.*] Croker!

[*The Man-servant hands the dish of mayonnaise to IRIS.*]

FANNY.

[*In a strange voice.*] Iris, dear, let us be alone for a few moments.

IRIS.

[*To the servant.*] I'll ring.

[*The man places the dish before IRIS and leaves the room, partially shutting the doors. Directly he has disappeared, FANNY goes to the doors and completely closes them. IRIS and LAURENCE rise from the table.*]

IRIS.

Croker!

CROKER.

[*Calmly.*] Yes, most extraordinary.

IRIS.

[*Looking over his shoulder.*] What——?

CROKER.

[*Rising and moving away.*] But there is nothing in

it, I am convinced. It must be an error—a gross libel——

IRIS.

Libel—upon whom?

FANNY.

[*Coming to her.*] Archie—Archie Kane!

IRIS.

Archie——?

FANNY.

Read it aloud, Croker.

CROKER.

No, no, I can't credit anything of the kind. Don't be alarmed, I pray.

[FANNY goes to him and takes the paper out of his hand.

FANNY.

[*Reading.*] “The disquieting rumours which have recently been current concerning the sudden disappearance of a well-known London solicitor are unhappily substantiated by a statement formally issued yesterday by Mr. James Woodroffe, of the firm of Woodroffe & Kane of 71 Lincoln's Inn Fields. From this document it transpires that the missing gentleman is Mr. Woodroffe's partner—Mr. Archibald Sidmouth Kane—and its frank avowals afford too much reason to fear that the books of the firm will be found to furnish yet another lamentable instance of the injudicious confidence of clients.” [There is a pause; then, in a mechanical way, FANNY resumes.] “Some sympathy is, however, claimed for

Mr. Woodroffe, whose indifferent health for the past two years has unfitted him for business, and who has, in consequence, been induced to leave affairs in the complete control of his partner. Mr. Archibald Kane resided in Upper Brook Street and was exceedingly popular in London society." [*Looking from one to the other.*] Eh—well?

CROKER.

I repeat, I can't credit it.

FANNY.

That he has disappeared?

CROKER.

That he's a rogue.

FANNY.

[*Faintly.*] Mr. Woodroffe's statement! And no newspaper would risk——

CROKER.

You have some other papers there.

[*Two newspapers remain upon the table. LAURENCE hands them to IRIS, who passes them to FANNY. FANNY gives one to CROKER and retains the other, and they proceed to remove the wrappers. As they do so, they exchange glances, and then, together, look at IRIS, who is now sitting, on the left of the table, with her face averted.*

FANNY.

Iris!

IRIS.

Yes, dear ?

FANNY.

Was another trustee to your husband's Will ever appointed in Tom Cautherley's place ?

IRIS.

No. It has been talked about. Some names are under consideration. Archie is the only trustee at present.

[Again FANNY's eyes meet CROKER's, and there is a further pause. LAURENCE goes out on to the balcony.]

FANNY.

[To CROKER.] You—you were in his hands ?

CROKER.

[With a nod and a smile.] H'm. And you ?

[She raises her arms slightly and lets them fall.]

IRIS rises.

IRIS.

[In level tones.] I entirely agree with Croker—we are upsetting ourselves quite needlessly. Dear Fanny, you know Archie—we all know Archie—too well to—
[Walking about the room.] There will be an explanation. This Mr. Woodroffe ! A case, perhaps, of a quarrel between partners. As for my own concerns, of course a fresh trustee ought to have been appointed at once when Mr. Cautherley died. *[Pressing her fingers to her*

temples.] Why hasn't it been seen to? Other interests are involved. I must see to it when I go back.

[*While IRIS is talking and pacing the room, FANNY and CROKER open and anxiously search the other newspapers; she sitting on the left of the breakfast-table, he by the lower window.*

CROKER.

Substantially, the same report is in this paper.

FANNY.

I can find nothing. Your letters, Iris! Have you received any letter——?

IRIS.

[*Examining her letters.*] No. [*With a smile.*] As you were saying—tradesmen's accounts. [*Surveying the breakfast-table and then looking at the others.*] Our unfortunate little *déjeuner*!

FANNY.

[*Energetically.*] We mustn't sit here. [*Jumping up.*] We must send a telegram—a wire to London!

CROKER.

[*Throwing his newspaper aside and rising with alacrity.*] Yes.

FANNY.

Let us get the report confirmed, at any rate.

CROKER.

Contradicted, we hope.

FANNY.

To whom can we—— ?

CROKER.

Leave that to me. [*To IRIS.*] May I be excused ?

[*She again smiles, in assent, and he seizes his hat and umbrella and comes to her.* FANNY sits, on the left, resuming her search in the newspaper.

CROKER.

Divinity, some day we shall enjoy a hearty laugh at the recollection of this scare. A scare—nothing else, take my word for it. Ah, yes, your charming breakfast ! You will invite me on another occasion ? [*Bending over her hand, a suspicion of a tremor in his voice.*] Many—many thanks.

[*He goes out at the door. She walks, aimlessly, to the middle of the room.*

FANNY.

[*Turning.*] Croker, if you meet little Aurea, don't breathe a word—[*following him*] Croker ! Let the child have her afternoon's pleasure undisturbed—— !

[*She disappears. The doors are left open.*

LAURENCE, seeing that IRIS is alone, comes to her side. They speak in hushed voices.

LAURENCE.

Iris !

IRIS.

[*Impassively.*] Yes ?

LAURENCE.

This man, Kane? Can it be that he's a scoundrel?
Is it possible?

IRIS.

No—*impossible, impossible.*

LAURENCE.

And yet—suppose—suppose——?

IRIS.

What?

LAURENCE.

Suppose he *has* been tampering—speculating——?

IRIS.

[*Tremblingly.*] With my fortune?

LAURENCE.

[*Eloquently.*] Ah, my dearest! my dearest!

IRIS.

[*Looking at him steadily, with a queer little twist of her mouth.*] Yes—after all—after everything—
wouldn't it be—droll?

[FANNY'S voice is heard, calling.]

FANNY.

[*In the hall.*] Iris!

IRIS.

Eh?

FANNY.

Iris—a friend!

[LAURENCE retreats from her side, as MALDONADO enters.]

MALDONADO.

[Advancing.] Pardon. I am very unceremonious.
Miss Sylvain——

[He breaks off. There is a moment of constraint on her part, then she extends her hand to him.]

IRIS.

[Almost inaudibly.] Maldo——!

[The curtain falls.]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is that of the preceding act. It is night-time.

Without, the lake sparkles under a full moon, while the lights of Bellagio cluster brightly at the water's edge. Within the room there is an air of preparation for the departure of its tenant. The druggets are removed, and the statuary, curtains, candelabra, and much of the furniture, are in holland wrappers. One of the settees is pushed against the wall on the left—some footstools are piled upon it; and between the middle window and the further window are two chairs, the one on top of the other. Two bottles of champagne and some glasses are upon the table on which breakfast was served in the previous act. On the left of this table is the other settee, on its right a chair. The writing-table now stands out in the left-centre of the room, facing the lower and middle windows. A chair is before it, and near at hand is a wooden packing-case. The lid of the packing-case is open, and the guitar and a quantity of books and music are seen to have been carelessly thrown in.

The birds have disappeared from the balcony; a single bird-cage, covered with baize, stands upon one of the cabinets. The room is lighted by oil lamps.

[FANNY SYLVAIN, with a set face, deep in thought, is seated upon the settee in the centre of the room. She is in semi-toilette and has a lace scarf upon her shoulders. There is the faint sound of distant music. The double-doors open and CROKER HARRINGTON, in travelling dress, is shown in by the Man-servant.

CROKER.

[To the man.] Please let Mrs. Bellamy know that I have just arrived.

MAN-SERVANT.

Mr. 'Arrington—yes, sir.

[The servant withdraws, closing the doors.

FANNY rises and shakes hands with CROKER heartily.

FANNY.

Ah!

CROKER.

My dear Fanny!

FANNY.

Dear Croker! Have you had a pleasant journey?

CROKER.

[With a wry face.] Pleasant!

FANNY.

How's London?

CROKER.

[Placing his hat upon the writing-table and taking off his gloves.] Crowded.

FANNY.

What, in the first week in October ?

CROKER.

Oh, under normal conditions I daresay I should have regarded it as a deserted village. But when a man is down, and desires to hide his head——

FANNY.

The pavement sprouts acquaintances.

CROKER.

Precisely.

FANNY.

[*Laying a hand upon his arm.*] No good news, then ?

CROKER.

[*Shaking his head.*] I might have spared myself the trouble——

FANNY.

You undertook it for our sakes as well as for your own. I meant—no good news for yourself ? We know *our* fate.

CROKER.

You do ?

FANNY.

We have been in communication with the people who are engaged in examining the affairs of the wretched Woodroffe. [*With a gesture of despair.*] Oh it's awful !

CROKER.

[*Putting his gloves in his hat as an excuse for turning away.*] I am glad it doesn't fall to my lot to break the worst to you.

FANNY.

I've been robbed of every shilling, Croker.

CROKER.

And I.

FANNY.

All gone—every penny.

CROKER.

Every cent—red or otherwise.

FANNY.

Where's that beast?

CROKER.

Archie?

FANNY.

Puh!

CROKER.

He's known to have reached America.

FANNY.

What has America done?

CROKER.

Poor devil!

FANNY.

Devil.

CROKER.

It was the collapse of this so-called Universal Finance Corporation that overwhelmed him, it appears. He was deep in it.

FANNY.

And we thought him a solid, cautious creature——!

CROKER.

We were gulls. At the end he made a desperate effort to save the concern, I hear—and with *her* money.

FANNY.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Oh! Where was he last seen?

CROKER.

At a theatre, complaining of the quality of the music played during an *entr'acte*.

FANNY.

If he'd only had the common decency to shoot himself! Good heavens, and I'm thirty, Croker!

CROKER.

I'm nearly forty.

FANNY.

And I'm losing my looks!

CROKER.

And I'm not.

FANNY.

Ha, ha, ha! You—you—you foolish——[*Hiding*

her face upon his shoulder for a moment, then lifting her head cheerily and brushing her tears away.] Excuse me for compromising you. You'll take your coat off? She will be down in a few minutes.

CROKER.

[Depositing his coat and hat upon the settee on the left.] Have you formed any plans yet?

FANNY.

Aurea and I go up to Scotland for a month or so, to relations—to enable us to “look round,” as they express it. Perhaps you can explain the process of “looking round” in the midst of a circle of solemn relatives.

CROKER.

[Returning to her.] Oh, you talk in a low key, and play Halma in the evening, and get to bed early.

FANNY.

Ha! And you?

CROKER.


One of the men I butted-into in town thinks I would make an ideal secretary for a new club about to be started in Piccadilly.

FANNY.

What is an ideal club-secretary?

CROKER.

A fellow who sees that the members have every opportunity for grumbling, and no cause. *[The music*



ceases ; he goes to the further window, which is open, and looks out.] Thank goodness, that wretched band is silent !

FANNY.

Your musical taste is as fastidious as Mr. Kane's. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] Fancy ! for the remainder of one's life, if one lives to be a hundred, moonlight, a still, luscious evening, the sound of music—always to remind one of ruin !

CROKER.

[*Coming to her and leaning over her chair, softly.*] Fanny.

FANNY.

Yes ?

CROKER.

How does she bear it ?

FANNY.

Splendidly.

CROKER.

Ah !

FANNY.

I've loved her, as you know, for years, intensely ; but I am *proud* of her now. Her whole nature seems to have expanded, Croker—become greater, nobler.

CROKER.

[*Tenderly.*] The capacity was there ; it only needed this.

FANNY.

Luckily she doesn't come off quite as deplorably as

you and I—our poor Divinity. Her new man of business believes he'll manage to salvage about a hundred-and-fifty a year for her out of the wreck.

CROKER.

[*Wincing.*] Tsch! I hoped——

FANNY.

It *would* have been more, but it turns out that she's heavily in debt, dear thing.

CROKER.

He never curbed her.

FANNY.

Kane? Not he! Tempted her, I suspect—[*starting up furiously*] professed to be discharging her bills while he was embezzling the money, I shouldn't wonder.

CROKER.

[*Soothingly.*] No, no; give the devil his due.

FANNY.

[*Her fingers twitching.*] If I could! if I could! [*Calming herself as she walks about the room.*] And so the lease of her house in London, her pictures and furniture, jewels, plate—they have all to be thrown into the pot; and she's left with the few louis she has in her *porte-monnaie* and the prospect of this miserable hundred-and-fifty a year.

CROKER.

But her friends——!

FANNY.

She won't accept a sou from a living soul, she declares. [*Setting herself upon the settee in the centre.*] That's where she's so fine. She *will* live upon three paltry pounds a week. She!

CROKER.

[*Standing beside her, with a confident smile.*] Ah, for the present. But, my dear Fanny, one isn't resigning oneself to the secretaryship of a Piccadilly club for the rest of existence. [*Going to the back of the settee and bending over it—speaking almost into her ear.*] I, too, intend to “look round.” And by-and-by—you and she—my playmates—companions with me in this mud-puddle game of life, in which we have all got seriously splashed——

FANNY.

[*Abruptly.*] Ah, stop—of course, you've been away—you haven't heard——!

CROKER.

What?

FANNY.

She has definitely engaged herself to young Trenwith.

CROKER.

[*Standing upright.*] Ah!

FANNY.

At a moment when a man with even a moderate position in the world——! But, there, she's given

her heart to him, and she's full of pluck. God bless her !
[*The distant music is heard again.*]

CROKER.

[*Somewhat huskily.*] God bless them both ! He—he's a nice chap. And a fortunate one. [*Sitting in the chair which is behind her, his elbow on the table, his hand shading his face.*] Capital ! capital !

[*Struck by his tone, she glances at him and observes his attitude. After a slight pause, she rises and moves away to the open window, where she stands looking into the distance.*]

FANNY.

[*Gently.*] As you say, Mr. Trenwith is favoured of fortune. But it isn't to be quite yet awhile.

CROKER.

No ?

FANNY.

Not for two or three years, I gather. He goes out to a ranche in British Columbia and comes back to fetch her when he has succeeded in making a home for her. He starts for London directly—at something before six to-morrow morning. [*Pointing to the champagne and glasses upon the table.*] Look ! you have returned in time to drink the boy's health.

CROKER.

[*Rising, cheerfully.*] Excellent ! I'll drain my last bumper of champagne to him, preparatory to taking to club-porter. [*Seriously.*] And she, during his

absence——? [*Observing the condition of the room.*] She vacates the Villa Prigno at once, evidently?

FANNY.

She goes into a humble little *Pension* at Tremezzo, for a while.

CROKER.

[*Partially suppressing a groan.*] Oh!

FANNY.

[*Coming to him.*] Yes, she also dates her new life, practically, from to-morrow. I've been upstairs with her, helping her to pack the few plain gowns she is retaining out of her stock.

CROKER.

Why, has her maid——?

FANNY.

Beaumont, her maid, went a week ago. [CROKER sinks upon the settee, burying his head in his hands.] Oh, my dear man, don't groan. Our Divinity! to see her on her knees among her trunks, with such a sweet, earnest, helpless, confident look—it's one of the prettiest sights imaginable!

[MALDONADO'S voice is heard lightly humming an accompaniment to the air played by the band.]

FANNY.

[*Listening.*] There's Frederick.

CROKER.

[*Looking up.*] Frederick?

FANNY.

Maldonado.

CROKER.

Oh, is he still here ?

FANNY.

Yes. He has been so brotherly and sympathetic to us women.

[*She goes to the window and meets MALDONADO.*

MALDONADO is in evening dress and is smoking. Notwithstanding the changes in his appearance suggested by FANNY in the previous act, he appears to be in excellent spirits.

FANNY.

Good evening, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

[*On the balcony*] What a perfect night, eh ? I've bestowed a few extra francs upon those fellows playing outside the Belle Vue. We will celebrate our young friend's leave-taking with musical honours.

FANNY.

Here's Croker.

MALDONADO.

[*Entering the room.*] The traveller returned !
[*Coming to CROKER.*] My dear boy !

CROKER.

[*Shaking hands with him without rising.*] Hullo, Freddy !

MALDONADO.

I am still kicking my heels about the verge of this monotonous pond. [*Observing that FANNY has gone out upon the balcony—lowering his voice.*] One's heart bleeds for these ladies. And yet they both—with the characteristic obstinacy of their sex—decline to avail themselves of my poor services. How goes it? Your visit to London has not proved too satisfactory?

CROKER.

Quite the reverse. Oh, except that I'm likely to take the secretaryship of the new club Bulkeley is promoting.

MALDONADO.

No!

CROKER.

Hope you'll come in.

MALDONADO.

[*With a protesting shrug.*] My dear, good Croker, we are pals of some years' standing, you and I—need I say more? Dooce take Bulkeley and his club!

CROKER.

[*Rising.*] Freddy!

MALDONADO.

[*Grandly.*] Pish! not a word. Pray write me a line.

CROKER.

[*With feeling.*] Thanks, old man. I haven't reached

that stage yet—never shall, I trust. [*Gripping MALDONADO's hand.*] But—thanks, old man.

[*FANNY returns to the room. The music ceases.*

MALDONADO.

[*Gently shaking CROKER by the shoulder.*] Confound you, you are as perverse as our fair friends—what! [*Breaking off upon perceiving FANNY and walking away.*] I observe the banquet is prepared, my dear Fanny. [*Throwing his hat upon the writing-table.*] Where are the principal figures?

FANNY.

I think I've just seen Mr. Trenwith in the garden.

MALDONADO.

[*Slightly unpleasantly.*] Ho! Is he meditating a parting serenade under Iris's window? [*Imitating the playing of a guitar.*] R-r-rhm! r-r-rhm, r-r-rhm, r-r-rhm—tum, tum! He touches the guitar most gracefully.

FANNY.

[*Sitting at the table on the right*] The mandolins. Don't be unfeeling, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

Unfeeling! I! When I am here to join in the general tearful farewell! [*To CROKER.*] You've heard the great news?

CROKER.

[*Again—seated upon the settee.*] Just heard it.

MALDONADO.

[*Carelessly examining a photograph of LAURENCE which he takes from the writing-table.*] And haven't I pledged myself to rise at an unconscionably early hour to-morrow morning, in order that I may escort this lucky young gentleman to the steamboat and report upon the final incidents of his departure? You'll assist, Croker?

CROKER.

With pleasure.

MALDONADO.

No, upon second thoughts, I decline to share the privilege. I hold the commission direct from Iris, and I claim the right of executing it unaccompanied.

[LAURENCE, *wearing a suit of blue serge, appears upon the balcony.*

MALDONADO.

[*Laying the photograph aside.*] Yes, here is the hero of the occasion. We are talking about you, my dear Laurence.

LAURENCE.

[*Entering the room.*] Are you? [*To CROKER, who advances to meet him.*] Mr. Harrington! [*They shake hands.*] I'm glad you're back in time to give me a parting shake of the hand.

CROKER.

Trenwith, I congratulate you, from the bottom of my heart.

LAURENCE.

[*With feeling.*] Isn't it—isn't it jolly?

[IRIS enters quietly, closing the door after her. She is plainly dressed, without ornament of any kind. Her face is somewhat wan, her eyes red, her manner very gentle and subdued; but her whole appearance and bearing express a spirit of happiness and resolve. FANNY rises, and the men, hearing IRIS enter, turn silently towards her. She advances to CROKER.]

IRIS. [Giving him her hand.] Dear Croker——

CROKER.

The bad penny!

IRIS.

With no satisfactory news of your affairs?

CROKER.

I'm all right—a bachelor whose hat covers his kingdom. What about yourself?

[LAURENCE is on her other side; she lays a hand upon his arm.]

IRIS.

[To CROKER.] They have told you——?

CROKER.

[With a nod.] I've returned in the nick of time, eh?

IRIS.

I should always have grieved if you had not been with us to-night. You congratulate us?

CROKER.

[*Smiling at LAURENCE.*] I've already patted *him* on the back.

LAURENCE.

That he has!

IRIS.

Give *me* your good wishes.

CROKER.

[*A break in his voice.*] Oh, my dear——!

[*Stooping a little, she invites him to kiss her brow.*]

CROKER.

[*His lips touching her forehead.*] I congratulate you.

IRIS.

[*Going to MALDONADO.*] Good evening, Maldo. We have dragged you away from the dinner-table. [*Surveying the table on the right, happily.*] Look at our modest preparations—the last of my excesses! After to-night—[*Going to the settee in the centre and speaking, across the table, to FANNY.*] Fanny, ask Henry to give us our wine. Croker——

[*FANNY goes out at the door. IRIS sits upon the settee and CROKER comes to her side. MALDONADO and LAURENCE—MALDONADO'S arm round LAURENCE'S shoulder—move away to the open window. The music is resumed.*]

IRIS.

[*To CROKER.*] You have heard everything from Fanny, Faithful One?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] You are moving on to Tremezzo, I understand?

IRIS.

To-morrow morning, early, [*closing her eyes*] directly I hear that I am alone—that *he* has gone. [*Recovering herself.*] I shall remain there for a few weeks—the *Pension* is moderately clean and pleasant—and then transfer myself to another cheap place, Varese perhaps. [*With enthusiasm.*] As long as I avoid heavy travelling-expenses, I shall manage admirably, admirably.

CROKER.

[*Compassionately.*] You are like a child with a new toy, Divinity.

IRIS.

[*Reproachfully.*] Croker! Poverty—a new toy!

CROKER.

A new experience, at any rate. [*Earnestly.*] Are you sure you are justified in imposing this ordeal upon yourself?

IRIS.

Ordeal?

CROKER.

This life of mean economy.

IRIS.

It is imposed upon me by circumstances,

CROKER.

They can be lightened by friends. It is maddening to reflect that I am useless to you at such a crisis ; but there are dozens of other people who are attached to you—Freddy Maldonado——

IRIS.

No, no. [*In an altered tone.*] Croker—[*He seats himself beside her, on her left.*] Dear, dear friend, I—I want to tell you—[*dropping her voice.*] I welcome this change in my fortunes ; I welcome it.

CROKER.

Welcome it !

IRIS.

I have deserved it, Croker. I regard it as my proper penalty, my scourge.

CROKER.

Scourge ! for what, in heaven's name ?

IRIS.

[*Evasively.*] Oh, do you imagine a woman can be as self-centred as I have been, pamper herself as I have done, without meriting chastisement ?

CROKER.

You are a good woman, to receive your reverses in this spirit.

IRIS.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Am I ? There can be nothing very meritorious in accepting resignedly that

which gives me self-respect, makes me worthier of Laurence, equips me for the future I am one day to share with him. [*Shaking her head.*] It is only another—a better—form of selfishness. Oh, but I feel so much happier; so much happier!

CROKER.

[*Patting her hand*] And to-morrow——?

IRIS.

To-morrow I actually enter into my new being. To-morrow!

[*FANNY returns, followed by the man-servant, who proceeds to open one of the bottles of champagne and to fill the glasses. IRIS rises and, going to the open window, speaks to LAURENCE and MALDONADO, who are now upon the balcony. FANNY joins CROKER.*

IRIS.

[*To FANNY, as she passes her.*] Thanks, dear Fanny.

FANNY.

[*To CROKER, eagerly.*] Has she been talking to you?

CROKER.

Yes.

FANNY.

Well! Am I not right—isn't she noble?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] All conditions of life are relative. For

her, this is martyrdom. [*A cork is drawn; he glances, over his shoulder, at the table.*] I feel as if I were about to help fire the faggots.

[*He stands with FANNY at the table, she on one side, he on the other. IRIS brings LAURENCE into the room; MALDONADO follows them and goes to the table.*

MALDONADO.

May I have the honour of presiding at these proceedings?

IRIS.

[*Sitting by the writing-table.*] How simple you are, Maldo!

MALDONADO.

Ha! there is a jealous light in our Croker's eye. But I would have him know that the idea of this ceremony originates with me—a stirrup-cup to Mr. Trenwith——!

CROKER.

[*Presenting a glass of champagne to IRIS.*] A stirrup-cup to a traveller by boat and rail! Your metaphor is faulty, Freddy.

MALDONADO.

[*Gaily.*] Hark! he revenges himself upon my metaphors!

[*CROKER walks away towards the open window, laughing. FANNY brings a glass of champagne to LAURENCE, who is standing at IRIS's side, and returns to the settee. The servant withdraws. The music stops.*

MALDONADO.

[*Handing a glass of wine to FANNY.*] My dear Fanny—

FANNY.

[*Seating herself upon the settee.*] Thanks, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

[*Giving a glass to CROKER.*] Croker! [*Raising his own glass.*] Our friend, Mr. Trenwith—my dear young companion of the past three weeks—whose departure to-morrow morning is, let us hope, an unerring step towards the brilliant future we desire for him! [*To LAURENCE, toasting him.*] Laurence, my dear boy! [*Generally.*] Mr. Trenwith!

[*All, save LAURENCE, put their glasses to their lips.*]

MALDONADO.

Yes, a few weeks hence our friend Trenwith embarks upon a career in a distant country, far away—a great deal too far away—from those who, in spite of short acquaintance, have learned to hold him in their esteem, in their affection. [*With a gesture.*] Laurie—

[*LAURENCE advances to MALDONADO, who again places an arm round his shoulder.*]

MALDONADO.

You have a stiff time before you, dear boy. But the thought of the reward awaiting you will put grit into the toiler, carry him lightly over his hundreds of acres, and give ease to his weary limbs at the end of the day. And then, the triumph—hey?—the hour

when the victor returns to us ; when he claims the prize ; when he is in a position to beseech delicate beauty to grace his modest establishment at—what do you call the place ?——

FANNY.

Soda Creek.

MALDONADO.

Ha!—and to beg her to transform it, by her presence, into a palace ! I drink to that hour and to the lady who inspires the fascinating picture—[*raising his glass again*] the lady who embodies, in her single person, loveliness, virtue, unspeakable charm ; whose very name, for those assembled here, is perfume and music combined ! Iris !

[*All, except IRIS, drink the toast ; after which ceremony FANNY puts her glass aside and goes to IRIS and embraces her.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Informally.*] Thank you, Mr. Maldonado. If one has to leave one's friends behind one, there is a grim consolation in knowing that they're such true friends—the best a man ever had.

CROKER.

[*Dryly.*] Freddy, I've never heard you in better form, even at a City banquet.

MALDONADO.

[*Good-humouredly.*] Ha, ha !

IRIS.

[*Going to MALDONADO with outstretched hands.*]
Thanks, thanks, dear Maldo.

[LAURENCE, IRIS, and MALDONADO form a group on the right, talking together. CROKER joins FANNY on the left.]

CROKER.

[*To FANNY.*] Fanny——

FANNY.

Eh?

CROKER.

Pish! Why need Freddy treat us to that piece of bombast? Of course it isn't so—but he spoke as if he didn't feel a syllable of it.

FANNY.

I agree with you—a few simple words and a handshake——

MALDONADO.

[*Paternally, to IRIS and LAURENCE.*] Well! having discharged my duty, and mixed my metaphors, I leave you two young people to yourselves and to the company of the moon.

[CROKER moves to take up his hat and coat.]

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] No, I am going to hand Laurence over to your keeping at once, Maldo.

[CROKER and FANNY look round in surprise.]

MALDONADO.

[*Also raising his brows.*] At once?

IRIS.

[*Composedly, but with eyes averted.*] You have promised to see him on board the boat in the morning?

MALDONADO.

Oh, yes.

IRIS.

Half-past-five——!

MALDONADO.

Five forty-two, to be precise.

IRIS.

It is very good-natured of you to deprive yourself of your rest.

MALDONADO.

[*Gallantly.*] Ah, for *you*——!

IRIS.

[*Smiling again.*] No, for *him*.

MALDONADO.

But I am to come to you afterwards, to bring you his final message?

IRIS.

[*With an inclination of the head.*] I shall remain here till you have called.

MALDONADO.

[*Bending over her hand.*] Good-night. These are the sad moments of life—but you are brave. That's admirable of you. Good-night.

IRIS.

Good-night, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Taking his hat from the writing-table and shaking hands with FANNY.*] I wish you good-night, dear Fanny.

FANNY.

Good-night, Freddy.

MALDONADO.

[*Shaking hands with CROKER, who is again at the further window.*] Good-night, my dear Croker.

CROKER.

Good-night.

MALDONADO.

[*Turning.*] You will find me in the garden, Laurie, sounding your praises to the lizards.

[*LAURENCE waves a hand to him in response and he departs by way of the balcony.*
LAURENCE advances to FANNY.

LAURENCE.

[*Simply.*] I want to thank you for your kindness to me, Miss Sylvain.

FANNY.

[*Somewhat remorsefully.*] Ah !

LAURENCE.

Fate is taking you in another direction for a time ; but I shall always think of you—it will be a consolation to me to do so—as being at Iris's side.

FANNY.

I shall contrive to be near her again soon, never fear. [*He holds out his hand ; she grasps it.*] Luck !

LAURENCE.

[*Firmly.*] I shall have it.

FANNY.

[*In a whisper.*] Don't be long.

LAURENCE.

[*Lifting his head high.*] No ; I sha'n't be long.

[*He leaves FANNY and encounters CROKER, who comes to him.*

CROKER.

[*Shortly.*] Well, Trenwith—— !

LAURENCE.

Well, Mr. Harrington !

CROKER.

When does England see you again ?

LAURENCE.

In two years—three, at the furthest.

CROKER.

I believe you. If I'm alive——

[They grip hands and part. IRIS is now on the balcony; LAURENCE joins her there. FANNY and CROKER, the one on the left of the room, the other on the right, stand deliberately looking away from the lovers. LAURENCE takes IRIS in his arms and kisses her; then he calls to MALDONADO.]

LAURENCE.

Mr. Maldonado!

MALDONADO.

[In the distance.] Oh!

[LAURENCE disappears and IRIS remains on the balcony, leaning upon the balustrade, watching his retreating figure. FANNY, discovering by a glance that IRIS is alone, goes quickly to CROKER, who is struggling with his overcoat.]

FANNY.

[Breathlessly.] Croker——

CROKER.

Eh?

FANNY.

Is *this* their farewell?

CROKER.

[*Puzzled.*] I—I presume so.

FANNY.

[*In complete astonishment.*] Good gracious!

CROKER.

Oh, but we forget—they have said good-bye already, poor children.

FANNY.

[*Nodding.*] Yes, that must be it. Still—[*rousing herself.*] Shall I assist you——?

[*She helps him into his coat. The band strikes up a fresh air, and the curtain drops. It rises after a moment's pause and the windows and the jalousies are closed and the room is in almost total darkness. Through the darkness IRIS is seen reclining upon the settee in the centre, sleeping. LAURENCE sits in a chair at the head of the settee, watching her. Both are dressed as in the earlier part of the act. The bells of a neighbouring church tinkle a little chime and then strike the quarter hour; at short intervals this is repeated by other bells in the distance; whereupon LAURENCE rises softly and tip-toes over to the writing-table. There, taking a match-box from his pocket, he strikes a match and lights a wax taper which stands upon the table. The light awakens the sleeper, who opens her eyes and, raising herself upon her elbow, stares*

at him. He produces his watch, winds it, and sets its time by that of a travelling-clock upon the table.

IRIS.

Laurence!

LAURENCE.

Hush! don't be alarmed.

IRIS.

[*Confused.*] What——?

LAURENCE.

The lamp has burnt itself out. The church-bells chimed; and I struck a match, to look at my watch.

IRIS.

[*Pressing her hands upon her eyes.*] I had fallen asleep.

LAURENCE.

Yes; I have been sitting here, watching you.

[*She rises, with his help, a little unsteadily, and walks across to the writing-table, where she consults the travelling-clock.*

IRIS.

A quarter past four. [*Turning to him.*] Oh! Why, you will soon—soon be—[*clinging to him*] almost directly——! Oh, how cruel of you to allow me to sleep—to waste the time! How cruel of you! [*Observing a faint light through the chinks of the jealousies.*] There's the dawn.

LAURENCE.

[*Sorrowfully.*] Yes.

IRIS.

The dawn——!

[*She turns from him and, seating herself in the chair before the writing-table, lays her head upon the table and weeps.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Bending over her.*] You were so white and weary. I saw your eyelids drooping, drooping; I hadn't the heart to rouse you. Dearest! dearest! dearest!

[*She composes herself gradually and rises, drying her eyes.*]

IRIS.

[*Humbly.*] Forgive me; I am very childish. Nothing can alter it—the day has to begin. [*Indicating the further window.*] Open the jalousies.

[*He opens the window and, stepping out upon the balcony, pushes back the jalousies. The dawn is seen, leaden-coloured and forbidding. She blows out the light of the taper and joins him at the window as he re-enters. He closes the window and they stand together for a while, his arm round her waist, gazing at the prospect.*]

IRIS.

[*Shivering.*] Oh! oh! oh!

[*She leaves him and walks away to the settee*]

in the centre, where she sits with a scared look upon her face. He follows her.

IRIS.

Laurie——

LAURENCE.

Yes?

IRIS.

[*Piteously.*] It was a mistake, dear.

LAURENCE.

A mistake?

IRIS.

This sitting together through the night and talking away our last hours. It would have been wiser if I had done what I at first had a mind to do—parted from you yesterday when the sun was shining brilliantly.

LAURENCE.

[*With an attempt at cheeriness.*] The sun will show himself again in a few minutes.

IRIS.

As it does when one is driving home from a late ball—defining everything sharply, making everything appear terribly distinct, [*holding out her hands to him*] terribly true. [*He sits beside her and, slipping her arm through his, she rests her head upon his shoulder.*] For how long was I sleeping?

LAURENCE.

An hour, perhaps.

IRIS.

And one's blood is always sluggish at dawn. It's at early morning that people sink and die. [*Tremblingly.*] Laurie!

LAURENCE.

[*Kissing her brow.*] Dearest!

IRIS.

I am afraid I have lost some of my courage; I'm frightened, I'm afraid.

LAURENCE.

Frightened——?

IRIS.

At your going away—at your leaving me.

LAURENCE.

Why, you were full of courage a little while ago.

IRIS.

Yes, and then I dropped off to sleep, [*nestling closer to him*] and became chilled.

LAURENCE.

[*Deliberately.*] Iris——

IRIS.

What?

LAURENCE.

Listen, Iris—now listen.

IRIS.

[*Fondly.*] I am listening ; of course I am listening
—listening—

LAURENCE.

Dearest, why should we not change our plans, even at the eleventh hour—abandon the idea of separating, separating until I am prepared to receive you ? Prepared to receive you ! what a stupid, formal sound the phrase has ! Iris, my love, my wife, follow me to London to-morrow. I will book your passage in the ship, by telegram, immediately I get to town ; we will be married as quickly as possible after our arrival at Montreal—there or at Victoria ; we will go out together. What do you say ?

IRIS.

[*Yearningly.*] Ah ! ah ! ah !

LAURENCE.

Yes, go out together ; share the struggle from the very beginning ; endure together ; build up prosperity atom by atom, together.

IRIS.

[*Shaking her head.*] Ah, if it could be, dear ; if it could be !

LAURENCE.

Why can't it be ?

IRIS.

Oh, what a contempt Fanny would have for me—— !

LAURENCE.

[*Disdainfully.*] Fanny——

IRIS.

After all my protestations. And Croker and Makdo ! [*Releasing him and sitting away from him.*] Yes, and how I should despise myself——!

LAURENCE.

Without the smallest reason.

IRIS.

Loathe myself ! And how you would despise me, by-and-by, upon reflection——!

LAURENCE.

I !

IRIS.

Recollecting that I had declined to make a sacrifice for you when I was well-off ; that it was not till I was poor—almost as poor as yourself—that I would marry you ; and that then I promptly hung myself round your neck like a stone—became a dead weight upon you at a time when you most needed freedom from care and responsibility.

LAURENCE.

Whenever you come to me—two, three years hence—you will come as a poor woman ; you will come as a precious burden to me.

IRIS.

But after I have had my own struggle, my own battle with poverty, singly, alone ; after I have proved to you that I can live, patiently, uncomplainingly, without luxury, willingly relinquishing costly pleasures, content with the barest comfort. [*Rising.*] Yes, yes—after I have shown you that there are other, and better, and deeper qualities in my nature than you have suspected ; than I, myself, have suspected. [*He rises and takes her in his arms.*] Then, then I'll join you, Laurie. And in the meantime you mustn't seek to make me falter in my resolutions. Help me to keep them, dear. I could cut my tongue out for having spoken as I did just now ; I felt cold ; I hadn't lost courage, really. [*Putting him from her and standing erect.*] Look at me ! Fanny declares she's proud of me. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] Well—and you—— ?

LAURENCE.

[*Kneeling before her and taking her hands in his.*] Proud ! proud ! No man, honoured by the favours of a queen, ever felt deeper pride than I feel in the possession of your love.

IRIS.

[*Bending over him so that her lips almost touch his hair.*] My love—yes ; but this other, loftier, purer side of me—I want you to be proud of that.

LAURENCE.

It is of that that I am proud. I cannot dissociate your love from your goodness ; in my mind they have

always been one. You have always been to me the best, the sweetest of women.

IRIS.

[*Smiling sadly.*] Ah! ah! But before you return to claim me you must forget. [*Entreatingly.*] You will forget?

LAURENCE.

Forget—and remember.

IRIS.

Oh, forget, dear, more than you remember. Come to me then as if you had never known me—or known me but a little. Let us then learn each other, as it were, afresh; raise up barriers between us, for the delight of breaking them down. [*Looking into space.*] Two years—three—!

LAURENCE.

They will pass quickly.

IRIS.

I pray they will; and yet, for shame's sake, not too quickly. So that, when you come to marry me, you may marry——

LAURENCE.

Yes?

IRIS.

One who is a stranger to you.

[*The church-bells strike the half-hour. They listen with strained ears. After a pause, he rises slowly.*

IRIS.

[*Dully.*] What is that?

LAURENCE.

[*Walking away from her, his head bowed.*] Half-past four, I think. [*Other bells are heard.*]

IRIS.

I have lived here—how many weeks?—and have scarcely noticed those bells——

[*She goes to him and they stand side-by-side, without speaking, their hands tightly locked.*]

LAURENCE.

[*After the silence, with an assumption of cheerfulness.*] I've a little over an hour—that's ample. I paid my score last night, and the porter already has my big baggage. I've only to make my toilet and throw a few things into a kit-bag. [*Rubbing his chin.*] No time for a shave, though. I wonder whether the wait at Como will be long enough to enable me to visit a barber.

IRIS.

[*Passing her hand over his chin.*] Untidy fellow!

LAURENCE.

Untidy! oh, upon the ranche——

IRIS.

You won't wear beard? not a beard!

LAURENCE.

It shall be removed, in any event, before—before we——

IRIS.

Yes, don't you dare ever to venture into my presence——

[They laugh together, pitifully; and, in the end, their laughter dying out, she cries unrestrainedly upon his shoulder. Then, with an effort, she leaves his side and throws open the further window. The heavy sky is now streaked with an ugly yellow bar.]

IRIS.

There are some rain-drops. Has the weather broken at last?

[He goes mechanically to the settee on the left and fetches his hat.]

IRIS.

[Coming to him and turning up the collar of his coat.] Run, directly you get on to the road.

[They walk to the open window.]

LAURENCE.

[Looking out.] Yes—rain. *[Huskily.]* I'm afraid you'll be—horribly dull.

IRIS.

Shut the jalousies, so that the servants may find them closed. *[With clenched hands.]* Go now.

[They embrace finally. He kisses her hands, her eyes, her lips.]

IRIS.

[*In his ear.*] I have loved you. I shall love you always. I shall love you always.

[*He goes out on to the balcony, where he pauses, looking at her.*

IRIS.

Close the jalousies ! shut them !

[*He closes the jalousies, she the window, and the room is once more in darkness. With a low wail, she totters to the settee in the centre and throws herself upon it, burying her face in the pillows and sobbing violently. The curtain descends—rising again almost immediately. It is now day, but the rain is falling heavily, and the lake, and the hills beyond, are obscured as if by a grey veil. IRIS—dressed as before—is sitting in a chair by the further window, absorbed in contemplating the dreary prospect. Her hat, cape, and gloves are on the table on the right ; and on the chair which remains at the head of the settee in the centre is her dressing-bag, open. The wooden case has disappeared, but the bird-cage, with its cover raised, is still upon the cabinet. The man-servant enters at the door.*

MAN-SERVANT.

I beg your pardon, ma'am.

IRIS.

[*Turning.*] Eh ?

MAN-SERVANT.

At what hour do you desire the fly—the carriage?

IRIS.

[*Rising.*] I am expecting Mr. Maldonado—directly he has left me. [*The man is going.*] Put the bird upon the front seat. Be careful. [*He takes up the cage, which contains a solitary canary, and is again about to depart.*] Wait.

[*The man returns, placing the cage upon the table. She goes to her dressing-bag and searches for, and finds, a small velvet sack. From this she produces, quite heedlessly, a handful of gold pieces.*

IRIS.

[*Throwing the little sack back into the dressing-bag.*] I shall be much obliged to you if you will distribute this among the servants, including yourself. [*Giving him the money and moving away towards the writing-table.*] I thank you all for the attention I have received here.

MAN-SERVANT.

[*Staring at the money, which he holds in two hands.*] I—I really beg pardon, ma'am——

IRIS.

[*Turning.*] What——?

MAN-SERVANT.

I—that is, we—we've heard—that is, we've been given to understand——

IRIS.

Eh? Ah, yes. [*Graciously.*] But this is the last time I may have the privilege—[*Busying herself in collecting certain little personal objects—her diary, date-case, address-book, a stamp-box, &c. &c.—which are upon the writing-table.*] I thank you once more.

MAN-SERVANT.

We—we are exceedingly grateful, ma'am.

[*Removing the cover from the bird-cage, he pours the money into it and, carrying the cage in one hand and the improvised money-bag in the other, withdraws. She takes up LAURENCE'S portrait and studies it fondly; then, after pressing it to her lips, she proceeds to find a place for it in her dressing-bag. The man-servant reappears.*

MAN-SERVANT.

Mr. Maldonado.

[*MALDONADO—wet and mud-splashed—enters briskly and comes to her.*

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] I have been waiting for you.

MALDONADO.

I went as far as Sala in the boat; [*giving his hat to the servant*] there I landed, and have tramped back.

IRIS.

Maldo! You are drenched!

MALDONADO.

Tsch !

[*He slips out of the cloak he is wearing and hands that also to the servant, who finally retires.*]

IRIS.

[*Gratefully.*] You have been true to your promise.

MALDONADO.

[*Triumphantly.*] A'ha !

IRIS.

Rising betimes, upon such a morning !

MALDONADO.

[*Laughingly.*] I was on my balcony at four o'clock, watching the dawn.

IRIS.

[*Turning away and sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] The dawn—— ?

MALDONADO.

[*Pulling off his wet gloves.*] I was restless—I suppose because I knew I had your business on hand. Before five I was outside the *Britannia*, throwing stones at Laurie's window. We had coffee together, he and I, and then, arm-in-arm, made for the pier.

IRIS.

Poor boy ! Was he very downcast ?

MALDONADO.

His heart was heavy enough, doubtless, but—[*with a shrug*] at eight-and-twenty, a new world ahead of you——

IRIS.

Naturally.

MALDONADO.

Phew! [*Seating himself upon the settee in the centre.*] Never heeding the rain, we paced the deck of the little steamer unceasingly. How time flies, when there is a common point of interest between two men! Our theme? Need I say we talked of you, of nothing but you, my dear Iris—our friend, our mistress, our goddess——?

IRIS.

[*Gently protesting.*] Hush!

MALDONADO.

Ha, ha, ha! no. Now I reflect upon it, I believe I appropriated rather more than my fair share of the conversation. On certain topics, when once I am set going—ha!——

IRIS.

I am sure you cheered and amused him.

MALDONADO.

Ultimately I was put ashore, and the boat went off without me—went off hooting into the wet fog—and I was left staring at the particular patch of cloud that had engulfed her. Upon my soul, I think I was the more cut up of the two—no, that's exaggeration, of

course. But the mental picture of the lonely lady of this villa—at her bed-room window, eh?—her eyes trying to pierce the mist—the mist of her tears and of the beastly, sodden air——

[He rises abruptly, and goes to the further window and looks out. She wipes her tears away with her handkerchief. After a moment or two he comes to her and lays a hand upon her shoulder consolingly.]

IRIS.

The last word he spoke—tell me——

MALDONADO.

Unfortunately, at Sala there was some confusion over his luggage and he was called from my side ; so he had no opportunity—dear chap!—of sending a final message.

IRIS.

[Disappointed.] Ah !

MALDONADO.

But it's not difficult to surmise what its purport would have been. *[Looking at his watch.]* Not difficult, at any rate, for a poor devil who is also compelled to wrench himself away from you.

IRIS.

You, Maldo ?

MALDONADO.

I, too, make my plunge into the mist this morning. I am driving to Porlezza, to pick up the afternoon train at Lugano.

IRIS.

[*Rising.*] You go to London ?

MALDONADO.

To Brussels and Paris. I have received some up-braiding telegrams from our houses there.

IRIS.

Ah, you have wasted so much of your time with us.

MALDONADO.

Wasted !

IRIS.

Bestowed so much of your time upon us, I will say.

MALDONADO.

[*Stroking his beard.*] I was determined, at all costs, to see the end of poor Laurence.

IRIS.

[*With a pathetic pucker of her mouth.*] And Fanny and Croker to-morrow ! And I—I at the little *Pension* at Tremezzo.

MALDONADO.

Picturesque, dirty Tremezzo, with its thousand odours ! That reminds me—before I wish you good-bye—[*running his hand over the outside of his pockets*]—tsch ! Have I left it at the hotel ?—no, here it is—

[*He produces, from his breast-pocket, an unused cheque-book and carelessly turns its leaves.*]

IRIS.

What is that?

MALDONADO.

Before I say good-bye, let me explain why I leave this in your keeping.

IRIS.

[*Instinctively shrinking a little.*] A cheque-book?

MALDONADO.

My reason is this. I have presumed—ah, don't be too indignant with me—to pay into my bank, to your account—to the account of Iris Bellamy——

IRIS.

No, no!

MALDONADO.

I am humbly conscious that I appear to be opposing your wishes in doing what I have done.

IRIS.

Deliberately opposing them, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

What a terribly censorious expression! Well, if the amount were anything very considerable, there would, perhaps, be some justification for it.

IRIS.

I have already explained——

MALDONADO.

But a few hundred pounds—a thousand or so——

IRIS.

Oh, Maldo!

MALDONADO.

As a small reserve in the event of your being pressed by a debt—a debt overlooked in the general settlement——

IRIS.

Please——!

MALDONADO.

Or your feeling unhappy at Tremezzo, or elsewhere——

IRIS.

[*Touching his arm, appealingly.*] Maldo——

MALDONADO.

Poverty abounds in unpleasant surprises.

IRIS.

Maldo! Maldo!

MALDONADO.

Eh?

IRIS.

Don't think me horribly ungracious. Indeed, indeed, I am full of gratitude to you, my dear friend. But upon the question of accepting help—money—I am firm; I am as hard as adamant. You must not, therefore, consider me unkind——

MALDONADO.

If you don't honour me by drawing a single cheque? My dear, I assure you I shall never trouble to enquire

whether you had recourse to this paltry little fund at my bank or not. [*Bitterly.*] So, in this instance, you will be less cruel to me than to yourself.

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] You *are* hurt. I am always paining you ; it seems to be my special misfortune.

MALDONADO.

Pish ! throw the thing into your writing-case and forget it.

[*He passes her and throws the cheque-book upon the writing-table.*]

IRIS.

I would prefer that the book were not even left with me, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Sarcastically.*] Oh, pray ! Won't you at least do me the favour of burning it ? May I not beg that indulgence of you ?

IRIS.

[*In distress.*] Certainly, I'll destroy it.

MALDONADO.

[*With elaborate politeness.*] My most profound acknowledgments !

IRIS.

[*Taking his hand.*] Ah, don't, don't ! [*Coaxingly.*] In a day or two I will write you a letter—a letter——

MALDONADO.

For small mercies—— !

IRIS.

Oh, why be angry with me ? What have I done ?
Maldo ! Maldo ! Maldo !

MALDONADO.

[*Looking into her eyes.*] It is impossible to be cross
with you for more than a moment. There ! I forgive
you.

IRIS.

Ah !

MALDONADO.

This—and the rest. Adieu !

IRIS.

Adieu !

[*He kisses her hands, rather too warmly. She
goes to the door and pulls the bell-rope.*

MALDONADO.

Let me see—you transfer yourself to Varese—— ?

IRIS.

Next month, I think.

MALDONADO.

[*Lightly but with intention.*] Is Varese pleasant in
November, I wonder ?

IRIS.

[*Unconsciously.*] Very, they tell me.

MALDONADO.

Tsch ! I fear I mustn't indulge myself in another holiday yet awhile.

IRIS.

[*As before.*] No ? You rich men work like slaves, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

Ha ! what else is there in life ?

[*He pauses a little longer, waiting for some further response from her. Receiving none, he looks at his watch again hurriedly.*

MALDONADO.

I must be off. Good-bye.

IRIS.

[*Raising her head.*] Good-bye, Maldo.

[*He goes out. At the same moment AUREA appears outside the further window and, after looking into the room, raps upon the window-pane.*

IRIS.

[*Turning.*] Ah ! [*Opening the window.*] Aurea !

AUREA.

Good morning ! here's a day !

IRIS.

Come in.

[*AUREA, who carries an umbrella, enters, brightly and eagerly.*

IRIS.

[*Closing the window.*] What brings you out into the rain? [*Patting her cheeks.*] To water the roses?

AUREA.

As we go to-morrow, I thought I might not have another opportunity of seeing you alone. You have always been so sweet to me——

IRIS.

[*Kissing her.*] Ah!

AUREA.

Aunt Fanny says I am to be most careful to avoid sad subjects when I meet you, and to be bright and cheerful.

IRIS.

She is right.

AUREA.

So I've come to talk solely about myself. I want you to be the first—the very first—to hear my news.

IRIS.

News?

AUREA.

[*In a voice full of mystery.*] It's a dead secret. I shan't breathe a word of it to aunt until the business is absolutely settled.

IRIS.

Business——? I'm waiting.

AUREA.

[*Laughing gleefully.*] Ha, ha, ha! Let me get rid of my umbrella. [*Resting her umbrella against the table on the right and returning to IRIS with an air of importance.*] Now then! What do you think, dear Mrs. Bellamy! I've a prospect of being able to make myself independent of my relations.

IRIS.

Really!

AUREA.

Yes, positively. You know, while Aunt Fanny could afford to have me with her, my position was just endurable. But now—well, I can't expect to find the world full of Aunt Fannies, can I?

IRIS.

Tell me——

AUREA.

It's all through Miss Pinsent.

IRIS.

Kate Pinsent?

AUREA.

[*Nodding.*] Whom I met at your house at Kensington. You remember your lovely dinner-party?

IRIS.

[*Looking away.*] Perfectly.

AUREA.

We struck up a great friendship that night, Miss

Pinsent and I. I wrote to her when we first heard of aunt's reverse, mentioning how I was situated. She's a dear !

IRIS.

[*Turning from AUREA.*] Yes. I am afraid I didn't treat her very considerably.

AUREA.

I'm certain you did ; you do everybody. She adores you ; so does everybody. [*In an outburst.*] We are going into business !

IRIS.

You and Kate !

AUREA.

That is, *she* is going into business, if she can overcome initial difficulties, and I am to be allowed to join her. [*Dropping upon the settee in the centre.*] Isn't it exciting ?

IRIS.

You enterprising little woman ! [*Advancing to her.*] Difficulties ? What difficulties ?

AUREA.

She has to find three or four hundred pounds, to decorate and fit up the rooms. [*With enjoyment.*] The rooms ! Four rooms ; two on the first floor, and two on the second, where the girls will work——

IRIS.

[*Standing facing AUREA and looking down upon her.*] But Kate *has* money.

AUREA.

[*Shaking her head.*] No. And her mother to maintain ! Isn't it rough ?

IRIS.

[*Insistently.*] She saved money : she saved it with me—in my service. I know it.

AUREA.

Oh, yes—but that went.

IRIS.

Went—— ?

AUREA.

Mr. Kane had it.

IRIS.

[*Sitting beside AUREA.*] Kane !

AUREA.

Poor girl ! she used to talk to him when he came to your house——

IRIS.

Of course.

AUREA.

And one day she asked him to invest her savings for her.

IRIS.

Gone—— !

AUREA.

[*Nodding.*] Dreadfully hard lines ! But she's

awfully dogged, and if she can only induce somebody to stand by her over this undertaking——

IRIS.

Poor Kate! Fancy the avalanche crushing her too! A nice creature.

AUREA.

I'm certain she'll manage it somehow; she swears she'll move heaven and earth before she owns beat.

IRIS.

[*Thoughtfully, with knit brows.*] That's all very well. If she doesn't—if she can't——?

AUREA.

Oh, don't suggest that, Mrs. Bellamy! don't, don't suggest that!

[*IRIS rises and slowly walks towards the writing-table, while AUREA, not following her movements, rattles on emphatically.*

AUREA.

Surely, surely there are plenty of generous, wealthy people who will lend a helping hand to a woman. Kate has tried for another situation as companion, such as she held with you, and has failed. The salaries offered are impossible; there's but one Mrs. Bellamy on earth, she says—all the rest are in heaven. Oh, it would be too cruel if this chance escaped her—cruel on her and on me. Me! I believe I shall break my heart if it falls through. I think of nothing else,

dream of nothing else—talk of nothing else, you'll say——

[IRIS is now seated, quite composedly, before the writing-table, drawing a cheque in MALDONADO'S cheque-book.

IRIS.

Hush ! hush ! I'm writing.

AUREA.

[*Rising.*] I beg your pardon, dear Mrs. Bellamy.

[IRIS carefully extracts the cheque from the book and blots it, and, taking an envelope from the table, rises and comes to AUREA.

IRIS.

[*Folding the cheque.*] Aurea, this little gift will put an end to those initial difficulties you speak of. Send it to your friend at once, with my good wishes.

AUREA.

[*Staring at the cheque as IRIS encloses it in the envelope.*] Oh—— !

IRIS.

[*Giving the envelope to AUREA.*] Say that I am sincerely sorry I dismissed her so unkindly—so abruptly.

AUREA.

[*Breathlessly.*] Mrs. Bellamy—dear Mrs. Bellamy—you—you mustn't attempt to do this for us !

IRIS.

It delights me to render this service—the last, perhaps, I shall ever render anybody.

AUREA.

But how—how *can* you——?

IRIS.

[*Looking down.*] I—I have unexpectedly come into possession of a—a trifling—[*uneasily*] Er—not a word, please, to your aunt.

AUREA.

N—no.

IRIS.

And, Aurea—mind!—you must put Kate Pinsent upon her honour—her word of honour—never to let a soul know——

[*The Man-servant enters at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT.

The carriage is here, ma'am.

IRIS.

[*To AUREA.*] Shall I give you a lift as far as the Belle Vue?

AUREA.

[*In a low voice.*] Aunt might wonder and put awkward questions.

IRIS.

[*With a glance of assent.*] I am to see you both at Tremezzo this afternoon?

AUREA.

Yes.

IRIS.

[*To the servant.*] Come back for my bag when you have let Miss Vyse out.

MAN-SERVANT.

Yes, ma'am.

AUREA.

[*Throwing her arms round IRIS's neck.*] Oh! oh!

[*She snatches up her umbrella and runs away. The servant goes after her. With a troubled, half-guilty look, IRIS attires herself in her hat and cape; after which, carrying her gloves, she returns to her dressing-bag. Glancing round the room, to assure herself that she has collected all her small personal belongings, her eyes rest on the cheque-book which lies open on the writing-table. She contemplates it for a time, a gradually increasing fear showing itself in her face. Ultimately she walks slowly to the table and picks up the book. She is fingering it in an uncertain, frightened way when the servant returns.*

MAN-SERVANT.

[*Standing over the bag.*] Is there anything more, ma'am——?

[*She hesitates, helplessly; then, becoming con-*

scious that she is being stared at, she advances, drops the book into the bag, and passes out. The man shuts the bag, and is following her as the curtain falls.

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene represents a room in a Flat at the West End of London. The decorations are in delicate tints of pink and green touched with silver, and the furniture is correspondingly light and dainty. The fireplace, where a fire is burning, is in the centre of the wall furthest from the spectator. On one side of the fireplace—the left—is a door admitting to a bedroom; on the other side a door opening from the hall. A silken portière hangs over the bedroom door. In the wall on the right there is a deep recess in which is fitted a luxurious divan, and beyond this recess is a third door leading to another apartment. On the left-hand side of the room a bow window, provided with cushioned seats, gives a view of the houses on the opposite side of the street. A writing-table, chair, and waste-paper basket stand near the window; on either side of the fireplace is an armchair; and in the centre of the room there is a circular table on which breakfast is laid tastefully for one person. On the left of the breakfast-table is a chair, and on the right a settee with a little table behind it. Other articles of furniture, all pretty and fragile, are arranged about the room.

The light is that of a clear morning in winter.

[IRIS—dressed in a handsome morning-robe—is seated at the table in the centre, a book propped-up before her, neglecting her breakfast. Her beauty has matured—become severer, more majestic; and her face has somewhat hardened. A grey lock, however, upon her brow, from which the hair is now taken back, gives a softening note. The door on the right of the fireplace—the door admitting from the hall—opens, and MALDONADO enters with the air of a man who is thoroughly at home. He is without his hat but is still gloved. He comes to the right of the table and looks down upon her.

MALDONADO.

Morning.

[*She barely raises her eyes from her book. With a shrug, he seats himself in the chair on the right of the fireplace and pulls off his gloves.*]

MALDONADO.

Devilish cold. [*A pause.*] Your breakfast gets later and later. The hours you waste!

IRIS.

[*Mechanically stirring her tea.*] I have nothing to do.

MALDONADO.

You do nothing.

[*Having taken a cigarette from his case, he*

searches for matches upon the mantelpiece. Not finding them, he goes to the writing-table. There he comes upon a match-stand and lights his cigarette.

MALDONADO.

[*At the writing-table.*] The matches are never in the same place two days running.

IRIS.

[*Ecily.*] Frederick——

MALDONADO.

Eh ?

IRIS.

I wish you would make it a practice to send your name in, instead of using a latch-key.

MALDONADO.

Why ?

IRIS.

It would appear a little more respectful to me in the eyes of the servants, would it not ? It's of no consequence.

[*After some hesitation, he produces a bunch of keys and removes from it a latch-key. Weighing the key in his hand meditatively, he walks towards the settee ; then he turns and tosses the key upon the table.*

IRIS.

Thanks.

MALDONADO.

[*Sitting upon the settee.*] Anything to satisfy you, my dear.

[*She picks up the key and, rising, drops it into a vase which stands upon the mantelpiece. The key strikes the bottom of the vase with a sharp sound. Having done this she resumes her seat and sips her tea.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Examining his nails.*] I particularly hoped to find you in an agreeable humour this morning. I wonder whether I can put you in one. Don't read. [*She lays her book aside.*] Iris.

IRIS.

Well ?

MALDONADO.

I was turning matters over in my mind ~~last~~ week in Paris. Honestly, I'm no more content with the present condition of affairs than you are.

IRIS.

Than I am ? I'm not aware that I have expressed any special discontent.

MALDONADO.

[*With a short laugh.*] Ha ! Upon my soul, you have the knack of freezing a man.

IRIS.

What is it you have to propose, Frederick ?

MALDONADO.

[*Leaning forward, his elbows on his knees.*] Iris, I want to invite you to come round the corner—to Mount Street.

IRIS.

To Mount Street?

MALDONADO.

To my house—in a settled position.

IRIS.

[*Indifferently.*] Oh?

MALDONADO.

Do you remember our talk of two years ago last summer, on the occasion of that dinner-party at your place, when you declared your willingness to do your duty as my wife, as mistress of my establishment, squarely and faithfully. You sold me then—a subject we won't enlarge on. Well, there hangs the old Velasquez still, and the Raphael, and the Murillo, and once more I offer to frame you gorgeously and to place you along with them; making you permanently—what was my phrase?—"mine to gaze at, mine to keep from others." What d'you say?

IRIS.

[*After a pause.*] Why now?

MALDONADO.

Why now?

IRIS.

Yes; why now?

MALDONADO.

I—I've treated you a bit roughly, you mean?

[*She rises, with an eloquent gesture, and goes to the chair on the left of the fireplace, where she sits.*]

MALDONADO.

Oh, I own up. I intended to have my revenge, if I could get ; and I've had it. Yes, I meant it.

IRIS.

[*Writhing.*] Oh !

MALDONADO.

I repeat, I own up. I make a clean breast of it, you see—as an inducement to you to wipe the slate.

IRIS.

It *was* deliberate, then, from the very first—cruelly deliberate?

MALDONADO.

[*With a nod.*] I'll even beg pardon, if it would please you.

IRIS.

Your arrival at Cadenabbia, from Aix——?

MALDONADO.

I'd heard you were travelling with that pup-dog at your heels——

IRIS.

Of whom are you speaking ?

MALDONADO.

Sorry—Trenwith. And I wanted to be sure; I couldn't credit it. You! To throw me over when I'd won you honourably—shove me aside, after my long waiting, at the moment of my success, for a lover! It kept me awake; I wasn't sleeping. That brought me to Cadenabbia.

IRIS.

[*Musingly.*] I've often wondered.

MALDONADO.

Ha! I believe I came by the same train that carried the newspapers containing the account of Kane's bolting. There was an opening at once——

IRIS.

To play the friend, the consoling friend—ah!——

MALDONADO.

[*After a pause, moodily.*] Anything more?

IRIS.

What would you have done if events had not shaped themselves in your favour—if Mr. Trenwith and I had not parted?

MALDONADO.

I don't know—frankly. It gives me the shivers sometimes—the mere conjecture. There were days at Aix when I felt mad.

IRIS.

[*With a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah—h—h!

MALDONADO.

Eh ?

IRIS.

I wish you had been merciful and had taken me out on to the lake and drowned me.

MALDONADO.

Ugh !

IRIS.

That cheque-book—you were sure I'd avail myself of it ?

MALDONADO.

I was pretty certain you couldn't drag on for long upon a few pounds a week. *You* couldn't.

IRIS.

[*Satirically.*] How mad you were !

MALDONADO.

And as your careering-about abroad, with a young gentleman in attendance, had alienated the friends who could have aided you, I calculated the chances were all my way.

IRIS.

The chances of your being able to destroy me utterly——

MALDONADO.

The chances of crying quits with Trenwith.

IRIS.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Oh, don't—don't—— !

MALDONADO.

[*After another pause.*] Anything more?

[*She is silent. He rises and goes to the fireplace, where he stands, his back to the fire, contemplating her.*

MALDONADO.

You're not over keen about my suggestion, apparently.

IRIS.

I !

MALDONADO.

I fancied you'd be glad. Upon my soul, I imagined you'd be rather—gratified.

IRIS.

[*Rising and standing beside him, composedly.*] I am sorry if you are disappointed. I'm afraid I've no longer the capacity for being gratified at anything. I haven't it ; it's gone.

MALDONADO.

It's odd that, somehow, whenever the question of marriage has arisen between us, you've always contrived to make me look an ass in my own eyes.

IRIS.

[*Languidly.*] Need you regard it in that way ?

MALDONADO.

Look here, Iris ! you must at least see that I desire

to make it up to you—desire to make amends. Surely that flatters you, if ever so slightly. You used the word “respect” a minute ago. Does this look as if I entertained no respect for you? [*Between his teeth.*] I’m d—— I mean, I can’t understand you.

IRIS.

Amends? What amends can you make me?

MALDONADO.

Isn’t marriage amends?

IRIS.

[*Trifling with the flowers on the breakfast-table.*] It’s too late, I tell you. I’m down, beyond recovery. I’ve lost heart. I no longer care. I’m shunned like poison——

MALDONADO.

[*Behind her shoulder.*] People cut you? You mustn’t blame me wholly for that.

IRIS.

I don’t. I’m not unfair. And it isn’t that which hurts me most even now. [*Closing her eyes.*] But to shun *one’s self*—to cut *one’s self*——! No, no; it’s all over with me—everything’s over. Marriage! a farce!

[*She passes him and walks away to the head of the settee. He follows her.*]

MALDONADO.

At any rate, in talking in this fashion, you take only one point of view. There’s another.

IRIS.

Yours? Oh, yes, there's your point of view. But why on earth should *you* wish to marry *me*?

MALDONADO.

Is it a novel wish on my part?

IRIS.

No; but bruised fruit——

MALDONADO.

[*Seizing her hands.*] Can't you be less bitter? Listen to me! listen to me!

IRIS.

[*Freeing herself and leaning against the head of the settee, facing him.*] I am doing so.

MALDONADO.

You'll laugh at me—no, that's not your way; you'll stab me with those steel-grey eyes of yours, tighten your lips till the sight of their thin red line stings me like whip-cord. All the same, you've got to hear it—I love you. I love you more than ever, my dear. What's in you? You're extraordinary. By the common rule of life I ought to be chafing to be rid of you; the fizz should have gone entirely out of what remains of the liquor by this time. But it's not so. I say it's wonderful, considering what's behind us, that we should stand here as we do—I again entreating you to be my wife, still entreating you, as I did two years back, for a soft word, a spark of warmth,

just a little tenderness. [*Gripping her shoulders and looking into her face so closely that she shrinks back.*] I shall never be able to do without you, Iris; you grow on a man—never be able to spare you. The idea of your wanting to break away from me one day is insupportable. What did I ask you to call me, that night in Kensington—Beloved? Fool! And yet this morning, notwithstanding all that has passed since then, I'd give half of everything I have in the world if you'd speak that word. I will give it; I lay it at your feet. Iris! [*Drawing her to him.*] Iris! you devil in marble!

[*There is a silence between them for a moment or two, neither stirring. Then she gently disengages herself and moves away to the writing-table.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Following her with his eyes.*] Well——?

IRIS.

I—I will think about it.

MALDONADO.

[*Passing his hand across his brow.*] Think about it——? Think about it! [*Going towards her.*] Oh, yes. [*Suddenly.*] You haven't heard from that fellow lately, have you?

IRIS.

Mr. Trenwith?

MALDONADO.

Mister Trenwith.

IRIS.

No.

MALDONADO.

Nor written to him ? [*She shakes her head.*] When did you last write ?

IRIS.

It doesn't matter.

MALDONADO.

[*Fiercely.*] When ?

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] Four months ago—or five. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] I forget exactly.

MALDONADO.

And he ?

IRIS.

He continued his letters for a time, reproaching me for forgetting him. They have ceased—ceased.

MALDONADO.

You are sure ?

IRIS.

Sure ? Quite sure.

[*She breaks down and cries. He watches her for a while, then turns from her and sits at the breakfast-table.*

MALDONADO.

[*Digging a fork into the table-cloth viciously.*] Will you come to a theatre to-night ?

IRIS.

[*Wiping her eyes.*] If you wish it.

MALDONADO.

Dine somewhere beforehand?

IRIS.

As you please.

MALDONADO.

Where?

IRIS.

Anywhere.

MALDONADO.

What theatre? [*A pause.*] What theatre?

[There are some unopened newspapers upon the little table behind the settee. She crosses over to the table and picks up one of them. She is unfolding it when he comes to her.]

MALDONADO.

[*At her side.*] How long will it take you to make up your mind?

IRIS.

[*Dully.*] About the theatre?

MALDONADO.

No, no; about our marriage.

IRIS.

A week ; let me have a week. [*Sitting upon the settee.*] There can be no necessity for haste.

MALDONADO.

[*Discontentedly.*] A week ? Pish ! [*Leaning against the breakfast-table.*] However, we'll say a week.

IRIS.

[*Gazing listlessly before her, the paper falling to the floor.*] If we do marry, you must promise not to insist upon my continuing to live in England.

MALDONADO.

Why ?

IRIS.

There would be a revival of interest in me, as your wife. Heaps of those who have dropped me, half-forgotten me—who wouldn't touch me, as I am, with gloves on—would rally round me because of your wealth. I couldn't suffer that.

MALDONADO.

I shouldn't ask you to.

IRIS.

What ! you and I alone, then, in that great house in Mount Street ! No, no ; not England, if we marry.

MALDONADO.

All right. So be it. [*With a shrug.*] We can easily



take down the Velasquez and hang him elsewhere. After all, England is a paradise only for the puritan and the hypocrite. [*His spirits rising.*] Ha, ha! Farewell, England! Land of lean women and smug men, of the drooping eyelid and the sanctimonious drawl! Land of money-worship, of cant and pharisaism, of false sentiment and namby-pamby ideals—in every department of life, the suburb of the universe! Ha, ha, ha! England, farewell! [*Advancing to her.*] Paris?

IRIS.

The women there are so terrible—the women who would claim equality with me.

MALDONADO.

One must live somewhere.

IRIS.

[*Wearily.*] That's it; that's it.

MALDONADO.

And yet, why reside anywhere? Who so at home everywhere as the homeless rich? We'll be cosmopolitans of the first order, shall we? [*Bending over her.*] Why, I'd carry Velasquez and his companions on my back, from city to city, if you'd walk beside me with your hand in mine. [*Holding out his hand.*] Ah, sweetest!

IRIS.

[*Looking up at him, with an expressionless face, and laying her hand in his.*] You are not all bad, Maldo.
[*There is a knock at the door and IRIS rises.*]

*They separate ; she goes to the writing-table,
he to the fireplace.*

IRIS.

Come ! [*A woman-servant enters, from the hall.*]

SERVANT.

Mr. Harrington.

IRIS.

[*Seated at the writing-table.*] I'll see him.

[*The servant withdraws, closing the door.*]

MALDONADO.

[*With a wry face.*] Tsch ! you don't mind being bored. He's become too sour and grumpy for words, this chap. You know they've kicked him out of the secretaryship of that club? How the devil he lives—— !

[*The servant returns, showing in CROKER HARRINGTON. CROKER has lost his smartness—is almost shabby—and has aged out of proportion to the time that has elapsed. He stands regarding MALDONADO with an expression approaching a scowl. The servant retires.*]

MALDONADO.

[*With a nod.*] Good morning.

CROKER.

Good morning.

[*He comes to IRIS and shakes hands with her silently.*

MALDONADO.

[*Leaving the fire.*] You were at the wedding yesterday, I suppose, my dear Croker?

CROKER.

[*Surlily.*] Yes.

MALDONADO.

And you come fully charged with all the delightful details, eh?

IRIS.

I hope so.

MALDONADO.

Miss Sylvain—a tolerably mature bride. I sent her a wedding present—which she had the impudence to return. [*To IRIS, as he moves towards the door on the right.*] May I write two or three letters here, while you chat to our friend?

IRIS.

Why do you ask me?

MALDONADO.

[*At the door.*] Do decide about that theatre.

[*He goes, leaving the door ajar. IRIS crosses over to the door and peeps into the adjoining room.*

IRIS.

[*Closing the door softly.*] He has gone into the further room. We can talk freely. [*She motions*

CROKER *to sit upon the settee ; he obeys her. Then she brings the chair from the left of the breakfast-table and sits, facing him eagerly.*] How did she look ?

CROKER.

Well.

IRIS.

Sweet ?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] H'm.

IRIS.

The bridesmaids—were there many ?

CROKER.

Four.

IRIS.

Four ?

CROKER.

Evelyn Littledale——

IRIS.

Of course.

CROKER.

Margot Cowley——

IRIS.

She !

CROKER.

Her niece——

IRIS.

Aurea ? Oh, yes—the girl I was rather fond of.

CROKER.

And a sister of the bridegroom.

IRIS.

Was the church well-filled? The Wynnings—were they present? The Chadwicks? the Saddingtons? the Vanes? the Glenne-Smiths? [*He nods in response to each inquiry.*] Oh, I knew them all! [*She weeps again, then recovers herself and dries her eyes.*] Well! *exit* Fanny! I passed her, the other day, in Davies Street. I saw her first in the distance, and put back my veil so that she should notice my white lock. Sorrow and remorse have their egotism, as ease and joy have, and I am proud of my grey hair. But she purposely kept her eyes down.

CROKER.

[*Brusquely.*] Perhaps—in time——

IRIS.

Never—with a husband. That hope's gone. You're the last. And you've altered towards me.

CROKER.

[*Sternly.*] Altered! What do you expect?

IRIS.

[*With her habitual pathetic little twist of her mouth.*] No, I must have disappointed you sadly. Do you recollect describing to me once, in the Kensington

days, your ideal of woman? It was at the time you were——

CROKER.

Perfectly.

IRIS.

You said you asked nothing more of a woman—what?——

CROKER.

Than that she should be beautiful to the eye and gentle to the ear; that her face should brighten when I entered, her hand linger in mine when I departed; that she should never allow me to hear her speak slightly of any honest man, thereby assuring me she indulged in no contemptuous criticism of me when I was out of her company; that she should be bountiful to the poor, unafraid of the sick and unsightly, fond of dumb animals and strange children, and tearful in the presence of fine pictures and at the sound of rich music.

IRIS.

And I inspired that!

CROKER.

You did.

IRIS.

[*With a sigh.*] How vain I felt! And yet—by chance, I suppose—never anticipating!—you left out something—something essential—that goes to the making of a perfect woman?

CROKER.

To the making of a good woman—yes.

IRIS.

[*Wincing.*] Sssh! sssh!

[*Bending forward, she lays her head upon his knees. So she remains for a few moments, both silent, he looking down upon her.*]

CROKER.

[*In a low voice.*] Iris—[*She sobs.*] There is one other item of news I have to give you—not connected with Fanny's wedding——

IRIS.

[*Inarticulately.*] Yes?

CROKER.

You will have no difficulty in guessing it, I fancy.

IRIS.

Eh?

CROKER.

The inevitable has happened. I've always warned you.

[*She raises her head slowly and stares at him. Reading his news in his face, she rises.*]

IRIS.

Back!

[*He answers her with his eyes. She sways and he catches her by the arm and assists her to the settee.*]

CROKER.

It occurred late last night. I turned into a little restaurant in Soho—an old resort of his, it appears—for my supper. He came in; we stared at one another for a moment—then he rushed at me. His ship had docked at Liverpool earlier in the day and he had just driven from Euston. I pretended that I had finished eating, and, after a brief talk, got away.

IRIS.

[*Her eyes closed.*] How does he bear it?

CROKER.

He's mystified; believes some one has come between you and him; and is here to find out the facts.

[*She opens her eyes and looks at him dully; then she suddenly sits upright.*]

IRIS.

He—he doesn't know, then?

CROKER.

No. [*She struggles to her feet.*] And I was careful that he should extract nothing from me.

IRIS.

He has not heard—not heard——!

[*She moves about the room in an agitated, aimless way, sitting in one place only to rise immediately and transfer herself to*]

another, and uttering brief, half-articulate comments as CROKER proceeds.

CROKER.

I allowed him to understand that your friendship for me had somewhat cooled——

IRIS.

Cooled——?

CROKER.

In order that he shouldn't be puzzled by my unusual ignorance concerning you.

IRIS.

Ah, yes.

CROKER.

“That's it, Harrington!” he said, “she is being drawn away from her friends. By whom?”

IRIS.

Ah!

CROKER.

He wanted information, naturally, as to your whereabouts. You had returned to London, I told him, but—how stupid of me!—I couldn't recall the name of the street in which you are lodging. Ha!

IRIS.

Well?

CROKER.

He has gone to an hotel in Villiers Street. I have

undertaken to hunt-up your address [*referring to his watch*] and to let him have it during the morning.

IRIS.

[*Pausing, confusedly.*] And—and will you?

CROKER.

Not without your authority to do so. My object was simply to stop him, for a few hours, from busying himself in making inquiries——

IRIS.

[*Nodding, faintly.*] Inquiries——

CROKER.

Thinking you might wish to be before others with your story.

IRIS.

[*Coming to him and grasping his hands.*] Ah! ah! ah!

CROKER.

[*Grimly.*] In the meantime he is occupied feverishly at his tailors and haberdashers, I expect.

IRIS.

What shall I do, Croker? What course shall I adopt? Quick! We shall be interrupted directly. Oh, help me, please!

CROKER.

[*Harshly.*] Excuse me; the rest is with you. I regret I don't feel able to advise you.

[*He turns from her and walks away to the fireplace, where he stands looking into the fire.*

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] Ah, that's unkind—unkind——!

[*She drops into the chair before the writing-table and sits for a time, her elbows on the table, tightly holding her brows. Then she seizes a pen and writes rapidly upon a sheet of note-paper.*

IRIS.

[*While she writes.*] Croker—Croker——

[*He returns to her slowly. When she has finished her note, she scrawls a name upon an envelope and rises. CROKER is at her side; she holds the note before him.*

CROKER.

[*As he reads it.*] You will see him to-night at nine o'clock——

IRIS.

Yes.

CROKER.

If he can come to you with pity in his heart.

IRIS.

[*Folding the note with trembling hands.*] You will take this to him?

CROKER.

[*Between his teeth.*] I! Oh, yes.

IRIS.

[*Enclosing the note.*] At once—at once——

CROKER.

Ho, certainly! at once.

IRIS.

[*Looking at him in surprise.*] Croker!

CROKER.

Having lied for you plentifully to one [*with a glance in MALDONADO'S direction*] I am now employed to deceive the other. Have you any further degradation for me? How much lower is my insane devotion to bring me?—tell me that! tell me that!

IRIS.

Dear friend!

CROKER.

Degradation! yes. A hanger-on! a complacent hanger-on! And to-day the common go-between! Ah, you have crushed the life, the spirit, the manhood out of me!

IRIS.

Oh!

CROKER.

[*Holding out his hand for the letter.*] But give it to me.

IRIS.

[*After a pause.*] No; I'll not.

CROKER.

Come! I daresay I'm brutal. And, perhaps, a little jealous! Jealous! There! what an admission! what a depth for a man to touch! [*Still holding out his hand.*] Come, give it to me. [*Meekly.*] This is the first time I've protested, at any rate.

IRIS.

You are right. I ought not to have asked you—
[*tearing up the note.*] I—I beg your pardon.

[*She throws the pieces into the waste-paper basket and, passing CROKER, seats herself upon the settee. He sinks into the chair by the writing-table, burying his head in his hands.*]

IRIS.

[*Staring at the carpet.*] Besides, it would be a dreadful confession to make to him personally—[*with a look, under her brows, round the room*] here, too. You haven't told me the name of the hotel—in Villiers Street, did you say? I'll do what you urged me to do at first; I'll endeavour to put it all on paper—to put everything on paper——

[*A door slams in the distance.*]

CROKER.

[*Raising his head.*] Maldonado——!

[*She collects herself and picks up the newspaper.*]

CROKER.

[*Rising and going over to her quickly—speaking in low, hurried tones.*] Iris, forget my boorishness. He shall be with you to-night at nine.

[*She grasps at his arm as he leaves her. He is at the door leading to the hall when MALDONADO returns carrying some freshly-written letters.*]

MALDONADO.

[*To CROKER.*] Hullo! you going?

CROKER.

Yes.

MALDONADO.

Ta-ta!

[*CROKER disappears, closing the door behind him.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At the fireplace.*] Where is he off to, in such a hurry—the workhouse? There's a man who knew half London; now he hasn't a friend in the world, excepting yourself.

IRIS.

[*Mutteringly.*] Except myself.

MALDONADO.

Eh ? [*Advancing to her.*] Still hunting for that theatre ?

IRIS.

Theatre—— ?

MALDONADO.

The theatre—to-night——

IRIS.

[*With a catch in her breath.*] To-night—— ?

MALDONADO.

Didn't we arrange—— ? Aren't you well, my dear ?

IRIS.

[*Rising — speaking hesitatingly and painfully.*] Maldo—the—the week that I am to be allowed—the week——

MALDONADO.

Week—— ?

IRIS.

The week in which to consider your—your proposal——

MALDONADO.

Oh, yes.

IRIS.

I wish you would leave me entirely alone in the meanwhile—not see me—not come near me——

MALDONADO.

[*His eyes blazing.*] Have you been consulting Harrington?

IRIS.

No. No, no.

MALDONADO.

Haven't you?

IRIS.

I have not mentioned the matter to him—not given him a hint——

MALDONADO.

[*After a pause.*] What, are you afraid that my fascinating presence would unduly influence your decision?

[*She is silent, her hands twitching at the newspaper. There is a further pause.*]

MALDONADO.

Oh, very well. You shall have a perfectly quiet time, if you desire it. I shall go down, then, this afternoon to Rubenstein's, at Bream Park, for a few days.

IRIS.

Th—thanks. Thanks.

[*She walks away to the divan and throws herself upon it, settling herself in its cushions, with her back towards him, and making a show of reading the newspaper.*]

MALDONADO.

Have you any postage-stamps?

IRIS.

[*As she arranges herself upon the divan.*] You will find them in my stamp-box.

[*He seats himself at the writing-table, discovers the stamp-box, and proceeds to affix stamps to his letters. While he is thus occupied, his eye is attracted by the writing upon certain scraps of paper lying near the waste-paper basket. They are fragments of IRIS'S note—some of which have fallen into the basket, others upon the floor. He picks up two or three of these pieces and examines them. Then he turns his head sharply and looks at IRIS. Seeing that she is not observing him, he hurriedly collects the pieces remaining upon the floor and also those in the basket. Humming an air to disguise his proceedings, he hastily fits the scraps together upon the table; after which he sweeps them into a heap and thrusts them into his waistcoat-pocket.*

MALDONADO.

[*Rising.*] Papers are dull this morning?

IRIS.

Very.

[*Resuming his humming, he puts his letters away in the tail of his coat and moves stealthily towards the mantelpiece. There he takes down a vase, shakes it against his ear, and replaces it. He repeats the process with another vase, this time with success;*

whereupon, first pulling up his coat-sleeve and shirt-cuff, he inserts his hand and arm into the vase and regains possession of his latch-key. Pocketing the key, he breaks off from his singing and, with an evil look upon his face, comes to IRIS.

MALDONADO.

This day week ?

IRIS.

[Giving him a hand without turning.] Yes.

[He leaves her as the curtain falls.]

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

THE FIFTH ACT

The scene is unchanged. It is night-time. The electric light, softened by shades of rose-coloured silk, diffuses a warm glow over the room.

[The room is empty. There is a knock at the door on the right of the fireplace. The knock is repeated ; then the door is opened and the woman-servant enters. Finding nobody, she goes to the door on the left and, drawing the portière aside, knocks at that door gently. Having knocked, she drops the portière and, retreating a few steps, waits. Presently a hand is seen holding the portière and IRIS'S voice is heard.]

IRIS.

[Very faintly.] Yes ?

SERVANT.

The gentleman, ma'am.

[The curtain is disturbed and the hand vanishes.]

SERVANT.

[Approaching the curtain.] I beg your pardon
ma'am——

IRIS.

Ask him in.

[The servant goes out at the door at which she entered and returns almost immediately with LAURENCE. LAURENCE is in evening dress, but, in place of his town air, he has the bronzed face and slightly stiffened gait of a man accustomed to life in the open. He is wearing an overcoat and carries a felt hat. The servant withdraws, leaving him gazing about him in some bewilderment. Slowly surveying the apartment, he puts his hat upon the little table behind the settee and is taking off his gloves when the portière again moves and IRIS appears. She remains in the doorway, her back towards him, clutching the curtain.

LAURENCE.

Iris——!

[She turns and faces him. She is clad entirely in black and wears no jewellery or embellishment of any description.

LAURENCE.

Iris—Iris——!

[He stretches out his arms. For a moment she wavers; then, with a swift movement, she sweeps across the room and falls upon his breast.

LAURENCE.

[Kissing her passionately.] My dearest! my dearest!

Iris, you are unaltered towards me? Iris! tell me you are quite unchanged.

IRIS.

[*Murmuring his name as she clings to him.*] Laurie—Laurie—Laurie——!

LAURENCE.

Kiss me—you don't kiss me——

[*With a cry, she takes his head between her hands and kisses him.*]

LAURENCE.

Ah! Nothing has occurred to cause you to withdraw your love from me? I only want you to assure me of that.

IRIS.

[*Her arms twined about his neck.*] I love you—I love you—I love you——

LAURENCE.

Thank God! Your silence has driven me almost distracted. How could you be so cruel to me?

IRIS.

[*Hiding her face against his shoulder.*] Cruel—cruel—yes, cruel——!

LAURENCE.

What had I done to deserve it? I can't understand your motive——

IRIS.

Hush ! Wait—not yet—not yet. Kiss me again.

LAURENCE.

[*Obeying her.*] Ah ! ah ! Ha, ha ! Let me look at you. [*Holding her at arm's length.*] I am dying to look at you.

IRIS.

[*Her eyes closed.*] Ah ?

LAURENCE.

You are more beautiful than ever.

IRIS.

[*Swooningly.*] Oh—— !

LAURENCE.

Your face ! it was always divine, but it has become still more spiritual—saint-like——

IRIS.

Ah, ha ?

LAURENCE.

[*Passing his hand over her brow.*] I see—you have dressed your hair away from your forehead. That is it—you resemble the pictures of angels one was familiar with in childhood.

IRIS.

A—a dark angel !

LAURENCE.

[*Observing her dress for the first time.*] Why, yes ; I didn't notice— Dearest, are you in mourning ?

IRIS.

[*Supporting herself upon his arm as she looks into his face.*] Mourning ? This is not mourning : it is merely black. Nothing but the loss of you would make it mourning. [*With an attempt at brightness.*] Ha ! it was my fancy to receive you in this gown.

[*She turns from him and walks away, a little unsteadily, to the fireplace.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Following her.*] How long may I remain with you ? You are not going to send me away quickly ?

IRIS.

That depends upon yourself. I—I am free for the rest of the evening.

LAURENCE.

[*Gaily.*] Depends upon me ! [*Taking off his overcoat and throwing it over the back of the chair on the left of the fireplace.*] Well, a month would hardly suffice for me to say all I have to say to you. [*Returning to her and seizing her hands, which he presses again and again to his lips.*] Dearest, why—why did you cease writing to me ? The torture of waiting for that infernal post—— ! What could have been your reason ?

IRIS.

[*Tremblingly.*] What did you imagine it was—did you think I was ill?

LAURENCE.

At first. I cabled home to Miss Sylvain, asking her if it was so.

IRIS.

To Fanny Sylvain——!

LAURENCE.

And received a laconic reply—"best of health." There my pride stepped in. Oh, the soil of a lonely ranche is favourable to the cultivation of a certain sort of sullen pride! Ah, but the agony of it! Iris, the theories I formed—all of them incorrect, doubtless——! Now, at last, you can blow them away with a breath——

IRIS.

[*Plucking at his sleeve.*] Laurence—have you seen Croker?

LAURENCE.

[*Nodding.*] Last night.

IRIS.

Yes; but to-day——?

LAURENCE.

No. He merely left a note at my hotel, giving me your message.

IRIS.

Message—— ?

LAURENCE.

That I was to be here, at your lodgings, at nine.

IRIS.

Nothing further ?

LAURENCE.

[*Shaking his head.*] Nothing further.

IRIS.

And you've met no one else of our acquaintance ?

LAURENCE.

Nobody. [*Smiling.*] I've been frantically busy, trying to make myself presentable for this visit.

IRIS.

Those theories of yours—what were they ?

LAURENCE.

One of them—[*looking about the room, a trace of apprehension in his voice*] don't tell me there was ever any ground for it——

IRIS.

One of them—— ?

LAURENCE.

Was that your friends had come to your assistance, on condition that you broke faith with a struggling,

hard-working fellow in British Columbia. [*Embracing her.*] Ah, forgive me!

[*The chair in which IRIS was seated, at breakfast, in the preceding act is now on the further side of the table with its back to the fireplace. She releases herself from LAURENCE'S embrace and sits in this chair, a desperate look in her eyes, steeling herself for her task.*

LAURENCE.

[*Leaning over her shoulder.*] Dearest, can you blame me? As I have said—the distorted ideas solitude gives rise to——! [*Surveying the room once more.*] And even now I can't help feeling puzzled——[*Dropping his voice.*] What a charming place you have here!

IRIS.

[*Faintly.*] Ah?

LAURENCE.

Did your new lawyer manage to recover for you more than he expected? [*Struck by a new thought.*] Iris, surely you have not been angry with yourself for not fulfilling your promise to starve during my absence?

IRIS.

[*Her elbows on the table, digging her fingers into her hair.*] You—you are nearing the truth!

LAURENCE.

[*Ferrently, his lips close to her ear.*] Oh, my love!

my dear love ! in whatever way these comforts have come to you, how could you doubt that I should be the first to rejoice that you have not, after all, been waiting for me in privation and anxiety ?

IRIS.

[*In a hard, level voice—gently pushing him from her.*] Laurence—it is about—the way in which these comforts have come to me—that I want to talk to you.

[*She points to the settee and he seats himself there, a growing fear expressed in his face.*]

IRIS.

[*Sitting upright, her body stiff, her eyes averted—with the little twist of her mouth.*] Laurie, this charming place is not mine.

LAURENCE.

No ?

IRIS.

That is—it is not maintained by myself.

LAURENCE.

By your friends—as I supposed ?

IRIS.

By a friend. [*A pause.*] A friend. [*A further pause.*] Yes, there is something—in your theory——

LAURENCE.

[*Shortly.*] Oh ? [*Slowly.*] You mean the condition

does exist—the condition obliging you to be untrue to me ? Iris—— !

[With an effort she turns her head and meets his gaze.]

IRIS.

[Deliberately.] It is a man-friend.

[He allows the words to soak into his brain, then he rises and advances to her. She rises with him and they stand, facing each other, on opposite sides of the table.]

LAURENCE.

A man-friend ?

IRIS.

Mr. Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[Under his breath.] Maldonado !

IRIS.

He is master here.

LAURENCE.

Master—— ! I—you must speak plainer

IRIS.

He—intended to take his revenge——

LAURENCE.

Revenge !

IRIS.

He never rested—never rested—until——

LAURENCE.

Until——?

IRIS.

He was able—to cry quits with you.

[LAURENCE recoils. *Opening her eyes widely, she gives him a final look of guilt and abasement; then she collapses suddenly, dropping into her chair and laying her head and outstretched arms upon the table. He continues staring at her for a time; ultimately, covering his face with his hands, he sinks upon the settee.*

IRIS.

[*Lifting her head.*] No, he never left me alone. There's no palliation in that, perhaps, no excuse—but he never left me alone. [*Bursting into tears.*] Oh, I meant to be poor! I meant to be poor!

[*She rises and goes to the fireplace, upon which she leans, weeping.*

IRIS.

He—he placed some money at my disposal before he quitted Cadenabbia—opened an account for me, without my leave, at his bank in London. That was the beginning of it—the beginning of the path leading down to this awful abyss. I remained at Tremezzo barely a fortnight. I went there, as you know, because it was at Tremezzo we had passed such delicious hours; and I believed your spirit would linger about those quiet spots where we had been constantly together, you with your sketch-book on your

knees, I close to you, both silent and happy. And so it was—only your presence became a reproach to me instead of a solace, a haunting reproach; for almost from the very moment of my receiving it, my hand accustomed itself to scrawling cheques, for one object and another, in the cheque-book he had considerably furnished me with. Therefore, finding my conscience wouldn't let me sit with your spirit in those dear retreats, I packed my trunks and slunk away to Varese.

[He has not stirred. She looks at his stricken figure wofully and wanders towards the writing-table.]

IRIS.

Varese! At Varese I found *him*, waiting for me. Unfortunately I had written to him informing him of my arrangements; and there he was, in the courtyard of the little hotel, and he came forward to greet me. I confess I was glad to meet him; it was a familiar face—*[advancing to the table in the centre]* Varese! How many times have I cursed Varese! He introduced me to some people who were wintering there—people who attached themselves to me, gave me treats, took me upon excursions. These I returned with interest. I felt myself compelled to have a small *salon* in which to entertain my new acquaintances—I who ought to have been weighing every sou; and soon, the afternoons growing chilly, I must needs send to Milan for a sable paletot to drive in. You see—step by step—he looking on——! And throughout all this I was allowing you to believe I was fighting the battle of poverty with you!

[He stirs slightly. She essays to put a hand upon his shoulder, but falters and draws back.]

IRIS.

After I had spent a couple of months at Varese, somebody proposed that we should move to Rome. And to Rome we went—the whole party. *[Pressing her hands to her brow.]* Rome! Rome! It was at Rome, shortly after we arrived there, that I discovered I had overdrawn my account at his bank. Strangely enough, he was advised of the circumstance by the same mail—of course, it was the crisis he had been waiting for—and he came to me promptly with his pocket-book in his hand. Then it was that my eyes were opened. Early next day I sold my sables for a third of their value and made off—got out of the city—fled—literally fled. And there commenced my long term of penury. Laurence, if you ever forgive me—if I am ever to be forgiven in this world or hereafter—it will be because of my sufferings during the months that followed my flight from Rome. Finding myself hopelessly embarrassed, I set myself to hunt-up my old friends in England. Friends! Ha! the scandal of our travelling abroad together—you and I—furnished them with a ready excuse to deliberately turn their backs upon a woman who had lost fortune and position. Only Fanny and Croker were left—Fanny living on relations at Stramaer, Croker upon his meagre salary as secretary of a club! Mainly to spare poor Croker the sight of me, I hid myself in cheap sea-side resorts out of their season, at the approach of their season crept inland to a stuffy town—all the while sinking further, further into debt

and difficulty ! At last every device for keeping my head above water was exhausted. I had even contrived to pledge the tiny income remaining from the wreck of my affairs, and I was without a shilling—absolutely without a shilling—my clothes nearly falling off me, my shoes in holes—ah ! I was in London again by that time ; it was as if I had come home for the finish. The horror of it ! the back room in the narrow, grimy street ; the regular, shameful visit to the pawnbroker's ; the listless, mechanical stroll out in the dusk for air and exercise—— ! I ! I—your Iris—— ! [*At the head of the settee.*] And one evening—he was continually tracing me and dogging my steps—one evening I met him and let him walk beside me ; and—he handed me the key of this flat. Oh—— ! [*Turning away and throwing herself upon the divan.*] They were waiting for me—these pretty rooms ; they had been kept prepared for me for months. That was my deepest disgrace—that he seemed to be so certain I should find my way here.

[*She lies upon the divan, sobbing and moaning.*

LAURENCE removes his hands from his face and looks about him vacantly. Then he rises and walks, stiffly and heavily, to the fireplace.

LAURENCE.

[*Staring into the fire—speaking in a toneless, expressionless voice.*] I—I am intensely sorry for you, Iris.

IRIS.

[*Raising her head, faint and exhausted.*] Eh—— ?

LAURENCE.

I—I am sincerely sorry for you.

IRIS.

[*Putting her disordered hair back from her brow.*]
Sorry for me——? I—I knew you would be. I—I was sure——

[*She leaves the divan and goes a little way towards him. Then, seeing that he does not turn to her, she checks herself.*]

IRIS.

[*By the settee, feebly.*] Ah—ah, yes—I ought to have spared you from learning it in this abrupt fashion. [*Sitting upon the settee, her eyes closed, her head resting against the back of the settee.*] How pitiless women are—especially to those they love, and have injured! Poor Laurie! But, dear, the first few weeks of my stay here were lived in a kind of stupor—inertia. I couldn't think—I couldn't reason. I didn't realise the dishonour—only that I was well-housed again. And afterwards—at one moment I would find myself hoping that the shocking news might reach you from other sources, at the next that my breaking-off with you might keep you from returning to England and that, by some miracle, you'd never hear the truth—at any rate, till I had passed away. And so the months went on—and on——

LAURENCE.

[*Partly turning to her.*] This man—he wished to marry you once——

IRIS.

He wishes it still, to do him justice. Now that he has—oh!—revenged himself upon us, he finds out that he wishes to tie me to him.

LAURENCE.

[*Facing her.*] He is in earnest? he means it?

IRIS.

In earnest! indeed, yes. And I—I suppose I should have acceded to his wish ultimately, if this had not happened—if you had not come back. [*Sitting upright and putting her hands together prayerfully.*] Laurie—Laurie——

LAURENCE.

[*Averting his eyes.*] Iris——

IRIS.

[*Going down upon her knees beside the table and bowing her head upon her clasped hands.*] Laurie—Laurie—Laurie——

LAURENCE.

I—I am very sorry.

[*He turns to the chair on his right and takes up his overcoat. Looking up, she sees his action.*

IRIS.

[*Under her breath.*] Ah! [*Struggling to her feet.*] What are you doing?

LAURENCE.

[*Hanging his head.*] I—I am sorry.

[*She retreats, watching his movements. He goes to the table upon which he has deposited his hat.*

IRIS.

Oh——! [*He picks up his hat.*] No——!

[*He advances, always avoiding her gaze, and stands before her looking upon the ground.*

IRIS.

You—you can't pardon me? Oh, try. [*She waits for a reply, but he is silent.*] I had my good resolutions, Laurie; it was through them that we separated, if you remember—that I refused to go out with you. The little good in me, then, has proved my downfall. That's hard.

LAURENCE.

I—I'm sorry.

IRIS.

You could trust me now, dear, if you would but take me back with you. Oh, it would save me from so much that is hateful. Try! [*A pause.*] No? You—you feel you can't?

LAURENCE.

[*Inarticulately.*] I'm sorry.

IRIS.

[*Supporting herself by leaning upon the chair by the*

writing-table.] Have you prospered? Would the home have been ready for me?

LAURENCE.

Yes.

IRIS.

[Dropping her head upon her breast.] Oh! [Rallying a little and returning to him.] Well, I don't reproach you. If I were a man, I suppose I should do precisely as you are doing. [Piteously.] Only I thought, as my first wrong step was taken for love of you—

LAURENCE.

[Covering his eyes with his hand.] Iris—Iris——!

IRIS.

Hush! I ought not to have said that to you; that wasn't fair.

[She cries for a moment, softly, then dries her eyes and offers him her hand. He takes it.]

IRIS.

By-and-by—in a little while—send me a photograph of that log-house of yours. Merely slip it into an envelope—will you? *[He inclines his head.]* Thanks. I should dearly like to have one—just to see——

[She withdraws her hand and, after a brief struggle with himself, he goes to the door. Almost involuntarily, she totters after him for a few steps; but he leaves her without looking back. When he has gone, she drops upon the settee and sits there stunned and

motionless. There is a pause ; then the door on the right opens quietly and MALDONADO appears. He is still in his morning dress, but his necktie is disarranged and his eyes are bloodshot and his face livid. He comes to her and lays his hand upon her shoulder. With a cry of terror, she twists her body round and faces him.

MALDONADO.

Your visitor has departed—eh ?

[She rises and backs away from him towards the left. He follows her.]

MALDONADO.

You rag of a woman ! you double-faced trull ! you liar !

IRIS.

Hush ! Maldo—— !

MALDONADO.

Ah—— !

[He seizes her by the arms and hurls her on to the settee. Then he stands over her, his eyes aflame.]

MALDONADO.

You—— !

IRIS.

Hush ! Maldo ! don't hurt me ! Maldo !

[Gripping her wrist, he pulls her up from the settee violently.]

IRIS.

Maldo ! Maldo ! don't hurt me ! Maldo !

[He throws her from him again and she stumbles towards the fireplace, where she falls into the chair by the table. Once more he goes after her, uttering ferocious sounds, his fingers extended like claws. In the end, he forces himself to quit her side and staggers to the settee, upon which, his rage partially spent, he drops panting. There is silence between them for a time, broken only by her sobs and his heavy breathing.]

IRIS.

Oh ! oh ! oh !

MALDONADO.

Ha, ha, ha ! Ho, ho, ho ! So—so—so you've lost your second sweetheart, have you ? Or am I Number Two ? Which of us do you rank first ?

IRIS.

You—you know ? You have listened, then ?

MALDONADO.

[Nodding scowlingly.] He cleared out pretty sharply. Your influence is a diminishing quantity, my dear. You must be getting old.

IRIS.

How did you—learn—— ?

MALDONADO.

The note you wrote to him this morning, and tore up. You shouldn't have thought better of committing yourself to paper and then have scattered the scraps of your love-letter about your writing-table. [*She glances at the waste-paper basket.*] That dog Harrington is running your errands, is he?

[*She rises feebly and goes to the mantelpiece, upon which she leans.*]

MALDONADO.

Ha! an enjoyable day you've all given me! I've been in this accursed street for hours, waiting for Master Laurence to arrive or for you to come out.

IRIS.

Well, you see he has left me—left me for good——

MALDONADO.

Yes, the fellow has more sense than I, after all; a great deal more sense than I. [*Rising and crossing the room, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.*] What an escape! what an escape!

IRIS.

Escape——?

MALDONADO.

Escape. [*Wiping the sweat from his brow.*] Phew! you're the sort of woman that sends a hot-blooded man to the gallows, my dear.

IRIS.

No, no, no, no——

MALDONADO.

You're not too old for that, still. Yes, to-day reads me a lesson. [*Partly to himself.*] Tsch! what a lesson, Freddy! what a lesson!

[*Absorbed in thought, he moves towards the mantelpiece. She shrinks from him and comes to the settee.*]

MALDONADO.

Oh, don't be frightened—my fit's over. [*Sitting, staring before him, his fingers drumming upon the table.*] Only I must be careful in the future—more careful in the future. The risk is too deadly.

IRIS.

[*Seated upon the settee, eyeing him wonderingly.*] Risk——?

MALDONADO.

[*Again partly to himself.*] I have no ambition to figure in the dock some day. That's not my game. [*To her.*] I come of a race whose qualities are curiously blended, my dear—made up partly of passion, partly of prudence. For some years now, thanks to you, I've been letting the first run away with me. [*Drawing a deep breath.*] I can't afford that. Freddy Maldonado can't afford that. [*Bringing his fist down upon the table heavily.*] To-night ends it—ends it!

[*Rising and pointing to the door which admits to the hall.*] You can go.

IRIS.

Go—— ?

MALDONADO.

This place is mine——

IRIS.

Maldo—— !

MALDONADO.

You'll take your departure.

IRIS.

Maldo !

MALDONADO.

You hear ?

IRIS.

[*Rising.*] When—when—— ?

MALDONADO.

Now. I desire to be left alone.

IRIS.

[*Bewildered.*] To-night ?

MALDONADO.

At once. This is your punishment, my dear——

IRIS.

Ah !

MALDONADO.

To drift back to the condition in which I found you a few months since. This is your reward.

IRIS.

Maldo——!

MALDONADO.

[*Ringing the bell.*] Go.

[*There is a pause, during which he continues ringing. Suddenly she stiffens her body and, like one walking in a dream, crosses the room and goes out at the door on the left. The servant appears.*]

MALDONADO.

[*To the servant.*] You'll all leave my service to-morrow, you women.

SERVANT.

Sir——!

MALDONADO.

Wages shall be paid you in lieu of notice, and a present given you.

SERVANT.

Thank you, sir.

MALDONADO.

Tell your fellow servants.

SERVANT.

Yes, sir.

MALDONADO.

[*Listening.*] That'll do.

[*The servant withdraws as IRIS returns wearing a hat and cape and carrying her gloves. Her head still erect, she moves towards the door leading to the hall.*

MALDONADO.

[*Playing with his beard.*] You—er——

[*Upon hearing his voice, she halts abruptly in the centre of the room.*

MALDONADO.

You can send for your trinkets and clothes in the morning. After that, let me hear no more of you. [*She remains motionless, as if stricken.*] I've nothing further to say.

[*A slight shiver runs through her frame and she resumes her walk. At the door, she feels blindly for the handle; finding it, she opens the door narrowly and passes out. Directly the door closes behind her, MALDONADO utters a fierce cry and, with one movement of his arm, sweeps the china and bric-à-brac from the mantelpiece. The fragments are scattered about the room.*

MALDONADO.

Ah! ah! Ho, ho!

[He overturns the table with a savage kick; then, raising a chair high in the air, he dashes it to the floor and breaks it into splinters. The curtain falls finally.]

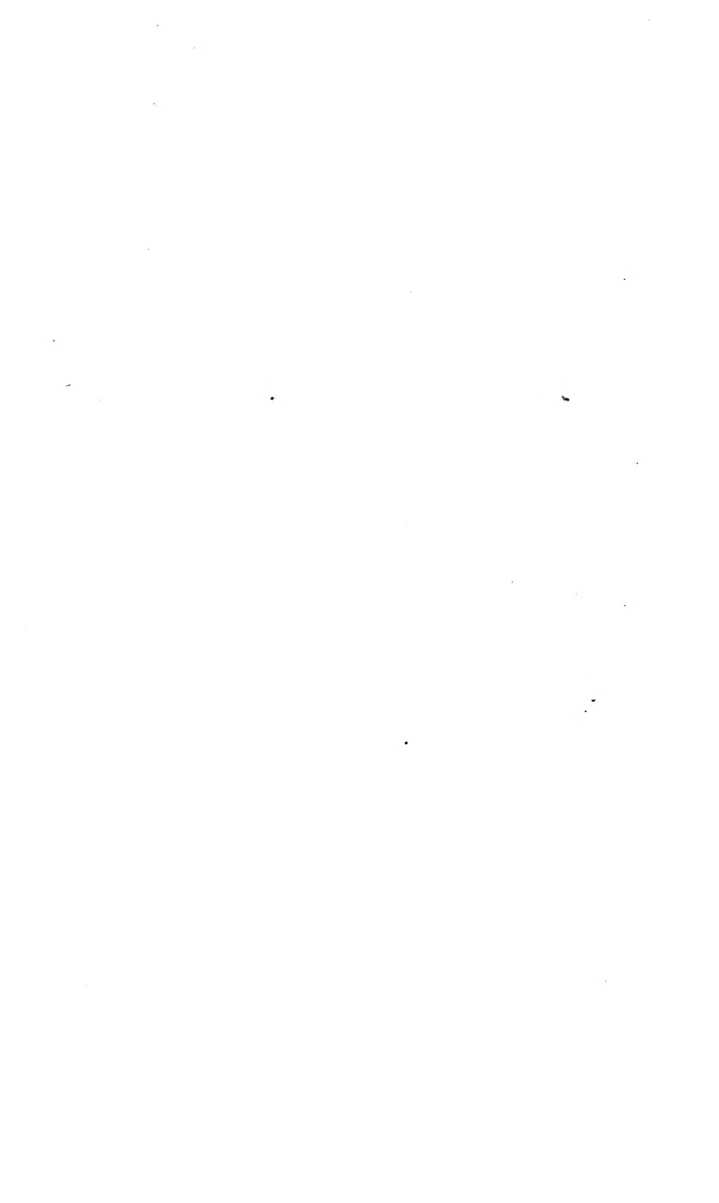
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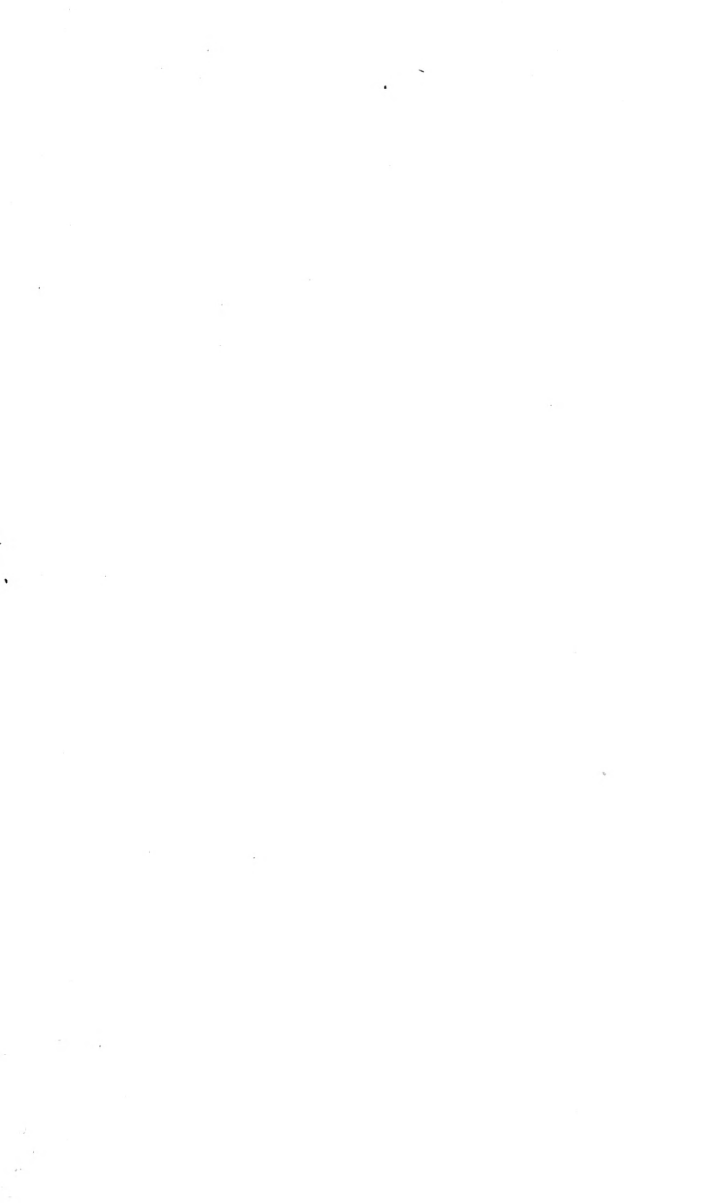


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